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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE ANNUAL

1972
EDITION

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Angrily, their leader had shouted:

"KILL MIKE SHAYNE"

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MIKE SHAYNE

1972
EDITION

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NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL "KILL MIKE SHAYNE!"

by BRETT HALLIDAY

The boss of all the Mafia hit the desk with his fist, and his three enforcers knew that Death was very near. "No one finks me out of a million and stays living," he said harshly. "I don't care how you do it as long as it's fast. The hit is on—now. Kill Mike Shayne!"

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Big Angelo, boss of all the Mafia, looked at his three enforcers, and death was in his eyes. "He finked me out of a million bucks. Nobody does that to me." He nodded, and they knew the hit was on:

"KILL MIKE SHAYNE!"

by BRETT HALLIDAY



THERE WERE four men in the library of the palatial home on Pinetree Drive in Miami, an exclusive residential section often referred to as Millionaire's Row. In the garage were two Lincoln Continentals and a Cadillac, all outfitted with bullet-proof glass. Moored behind the house and wide lawns was a sixty-foot yacht trim as a barracuda and just about as fast.

The master of all this was Big Angelo Perrini, Mafia boss, a monolithic hulk of a man with

narrow set eyes, swarthy complexion, a big nose, and coarse mouth.

Perrini sat behind the large mahogany desk and drummed his fingers, eyed each of the three men in the room who sat in leather armchairs in front of him.

The three men were Vincent "Trigger Happy" Carrazo, Don "Snag" Fresco, and Vito "The Shadow" Marrone.

They kept their eyes on Perrini. They knew that when he drummed his fingers in that

nervous, staccato way that he had another hit for them. They had not heard of anyone who had got out of line so they were curious as to who the intended victim could be.

Perrini said, "You guys ever hear of Mike Shayne?" He drummed his fingers faster, an indication of the heat of his hate for the man whose name he had spoken.

Marrone said, "The private eye? A big redhead? Yeah, I heard of him. What's up?"

Perrini's thick lips twisted into a sneer and the beady dark eyes shone malevolently. His hand closed into fists and he banged them on the desk.

"Kill him!" he cried hoarsely.

The three men who sat before Perrini shot quick glances at each other, mild expressions of puzzlement written on their faces.

Vito "The Shadow" Marrone, a slim, darkly handsome young man in his mid-twenties who looked like a college senior but was the deadliest of the three killers, a silken smooth assassin whose specialty was the stiletto, said, "What's Shayne done, Angelo? Why the hit?"

Perrini half-turned in his chair, his anger deepening. "What the hell kind of a question is that? What's he done? He insulted my wife! He refused to mow my lawn! I said to kill him,

goddammit! Do I have to explain why?"

Marrone's quiet manner didn't change. "This guy isn't a hood, Angelo, and he's not just a private eye. He's got a big clout with all the cops in Miami, on the Beach, and with the feds. We knock him off and there'll be more heat on this town than there is in hell. The feds and the cops from Miami and the Beach won't stop until they get the guys who knock him off."

Perrini leaned back in his chair and fixed his eyes on Marrone. "I took you into my organization five years ago when you didn't have two quarters to rub together. Whatta you got in your pockets now, eh? C-notes? G-notes? How old are you, twenty-four, five? How many guys your age are running around in a fancy car, living in a fancy apartment, show broads chasing them, eh? Me, goddammit! I did that for you! Why? Because when I said to hit somebody, you hit them!"

"I know what you did for me, Angelo. I haven't forgotten it. Not even this minute. I said what I did because I was thinking of you as much as I was thinking of me and Don and Vincent. Knocking off Mike Shayne is no problem, no more than any other guy. It's what may come after the killing that I was thinking about."

THE NEW, COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



Carrazo, a short, stocky ex-con in his late thirties, said, "I think Vito's got a point, Angelo. Maybe we could straighten Shayne out by a little reasoning, you know?"

"Hunh!" Perrini grunted. "You think you can reason with Shayne? He's a cop, all the way. I checked him out. You know why I want him hit? I'll tell you. It cost me five G's to find out he was the bastard who fingered the narcotics deal from Algiers. Twenty million dollars worth of stuff. It was a Syndicate deal. Italy, France, Chicago. They've put the heat on me. Mike Shayne!" He swore. "How the hell could he get the information, that's what I want to find out!"

"That's pretty hard to believe," Don Fresco said. "A private eye snooping after a narcotics shipment. It doesn't make sense."

"That's the whole damned thing!" Perrini exploded. "It doesn't make sense. No one knew about it except the four of us in this room." He stared hard at the three men, discarded the thought that suddenly came to his mind. Hell, they had enough on him to put him away for life so why would they do a thing like this? Who then?

"My information is that Interpol got into the act," Perrini, said, "the French Depart-

ment of Drugs, and the director of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. The only one not in on it was J. Edgar Hoover, and he's dead. What's more, there's another twenty million on a ship in Casablanca waiting to sail. It's being held up."

"Why don't we pick Shayne up and bring him to you?" Marrone said. "He might talk with a little persuasion. Knocking him off will end any chance you might have of finding out how he got his information. How does that strike you?"

Perrini clapped a hand to his head in a gesture of frustration. He let out a deep sigh before he spoke. "The trouble with this business is that you have to think for everybody. You pick up Mike Shayne, bring him here, and, as you suggest, I ask him how he got wind of this shipment and I put the finger on myself. I said they got the stuff. I didn't say they knew where the stuff was going, did I?"

He looked from one to the other of the three men and shook his head.

"Well?" he said.

Vito Marrone said, "You mentioned that Shayne had information on this other shipment. If so—"

"You don't listen too good, Marrone. I said, in the same words, 'I think Shayne has got

wind of that too.' Isn't that what I said?"

Marrone's face turned a slight pink. "Yes, that's what you said."

"All right then. Let's go back a little. Shayne wouldn't tell you the time of day if he owned Big Ben. You might as well talk to a mummy. That's the end of your suggestion. My thinking is that he's after bigger game than helping the feds to nail the shipments of H. He's out to get me, to break up the Miami operation. Now, who could have paid him off to do that? You got any ideas? You, Carrazo?"

Carrazo shook his head. "No, I can't think of anyone."

"You, Fresco? You got any idea?"

Don Fresco shook his head. "Nope. Who would have the guts to try that?"

Perrini laughed on a cynical note. "Who? Half a dozen different guys! That's who!" He turned to Marrone. "You, Vito. You're a very smart boy. What's your guess?"

Marrone shrugged. Perrini's sarcasm had gotten under his skin. When he first came into the Organization he looked upon Angelo Perrini as a man who was smarter than any of his predecessors in criminal syndicalism ever had been. He knew of Capone, Luciano, Genovese, Meyer Lansky, and many of the others, and



the way they had controlled not only their own gangs but a large division of the national structure.

In the five years that Marrone was in the Organization he had seen Perrini take over completely the control of gambling, loan-sharking, bail-bonds, narcotics, and many unions from Miami all the way up the Coast to Jacksonville.

Not only was he in the rackets but in legitimate enterprises as well—hotels, motels, restaurants, services of all kinds. His political influence included judges, city and county officials, and many top government officials as well. His connections threaded out to

New York, New Orleans, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Las Vegas, and Los Angeles.

Vito Marrone respected the brains that had fashioned all that. He also envied it. He wanted something like it for himself and promised himself he would get it, all the possessions. He envied most of all Perrini's young and beautiful dark-haired wife. He dreamed of Harriet often, and his desire for her was like a sickness. Each time he saw her he felt his stomach knot up, his legs tremble, and his heart beat so hard he thought it would burst within him.

Harriet always smiled at him when they encountered each other. There was something provocative about the way she smiled at him, challenging, as if she were saying, "You want me, don't you? So, why don't you try to get me?"

One time she brushed against him and a lush breast, full, soft, yielding, lay against his bare arm for several seconds. He had all he could do to restrain himself from taking her in his arms, crushing her to him, kissing that rich, moist mouth into submission. He was shaken by the experience for days, and he cursed her and wanted her more than ever.

He felt an indefinable anger and hate against Angelo Perrini for the things he had that had bought Harriet. He hated him a

little also for the way Perrini needled him, his sarcasm, the insults to his intelligence. He regarded Perrini now with a gray insolence. *You, Vito, you're a very smart boy. What's your guess?*

"I don't guess, Angelo," Marrone replied evenly. "You have all the sources of information. How could I guess?"

Perrini made a tent of his fingers and put them to his lips, nodded his head. "Yes, Vito, you're a very smart boy. You're right, I have information. I'll tell you about it, all of you.

"About four years ago a man named Oreste Manzo came to New York on a fake passport from the Conca d'Ore valley in Palermo. He was a great power in Sicily, led a gang of brigands, exacted tribute from the low and the high. He was feared and hated. He finally killed an important member of the city council of Palermo, a very rich man who had a lovely young wife. He raped the wife and took her into his home in the hills. The heat was turned on him.

And despite the fact that he was the boss of the powerful *Stoppaglieria* faction of the Mafia, the word went out to kill him. He escaped his assassins. This man, Oreste Manzo, had killed more than a hundred men, a hunter of human life, killed—"He paused and looked directly at

Vito Marrone, "as you kill, Vito. Silently. Swiftly. This hunter now became the hunted. Oreste Manzo has been in Miami for six months! You get the picture?"

He looked from one to the other of the three men. He banged his fist down on the desk. "Bah! What the hell is the use!"

Vito Marrone fidgeted in his seat. Vincent Carrazo and Don Fresco regarded Perrini impassively.

"All right! I'll explain it!" Perrini said. "Oreste Manzo has gotten to somebody in our Organization. He found out about the shipment of heroin, either from that somebody or through his connections in Sicily. The word got to Mike Shayne, by scheming, conniving, by treachery. First, I want to know who betrayed me in the Organization. Next, kill Oreste Manzo. Next, kill Mike Shayne.

"I will learn who betrayed me. You, Vito, find Oreste Manzo and kill him. You, two," he pointed a finger at Carrazo and Fresco, "kill Mike Shayne!"

Vito Marrone said, "You think then that Oreste Manzo wants to take over your position, is that it?"

Perrini grunted. "Bright boy. You finally figured it out, eh?"

Vito grinned mirthlessly. "Yes, Angelo, I finally figured it out. Okay, I will kill Oreste Manzo. Anything else?"

"No, nothing else. You may go. Yes, one more thing. Don't waste any time." He rose from his seat. "I have other matters."

It was a dismissal. The three men rose and walked from the room.

II

IT WAS ten o'clock in the morning that Mike Shayne received the telephone call. It was the same woman's voice, sultry, suggestive, yet crisp and business-like.

"Mr. Shayne, this is your friend again."

"Yes, friend," Shayne answered, "when do we meet so I can thank you? I would like to meet you."

"Ah, but that would destroy all the mystery. For all you know, I may be a hag, old, toothless, thinned out hair, wrinkled. No, Mr. Shayne, it is better this way. Please listen. You are marked for death. Two men have been given the contract on you. Vincent 'Trigger Happy' Carrazo and Don 'Snag' Fresco. Their orders are to kill you at once. I wanted to warn you."

"Carrazo and Fresco, eh? That's interesting. Where's the bright boy, Vito Marrone?"

"He's not in it."

"What is he in on?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne, but that's all the information I can

give you for now. Take care of yourself. Good day." She hung up before he could question her further.

Shayne replaced the receiver on the stand and stood there for several long moments in deep thought. Only one woman could have the kind of information he had been fed. The three men she mentioned were her husband's hit men. It had to be Harriet Perrini.

If it was she, then why? It didn't make sense. She had everything she wanted. Of course, Angelo Perrini was about twenty-five or thirty years her senior, but then luxury can compensate for coarse love, for some women, that is.

He remembered Harriet Corliss when she was singing in clubs around the Beach. She had been married briefly to a young and brilliant nuclear physicist named Benedict Koren. She had met Angelo Perrini while her husband was on assignment to NASA at Cape Canaveral. Perrini offered to help her in her career, make her a headliner. He showered her with expensive gifts, took out charge accounts in her name at the most exclusive shops. She divorced her husband and when Perrini wanted her to take an apartment in one of the buildings he owned she refused.

"Not good enough for me, Angelo. I'm not going to be your

mistress. If you want me, marry me."

He married her.

He did make her a headliner but she couldn't stay on top because she didn't have what it takes. All she had was youth, a sultry kind of beauty, and just enough voice to get by. She asked Perrini to get her roles in movies.

"What the hell do you want to get into that rat race for, huh? You'll make a picture and the critics will tear you to pieces. Let's face it, honey. You've got looks, that's all."

"That's enough. If they can make a star out of women like Lana Turner, Natalie Wood, and Debbie Reynolds then they can make a star out of me. I'm sure as hell better looking than any of them, or all three put together!"

Perrini let out a loud laugh. "Sure you are, honey. But those gals have got talent. They had it to start with. Sure, a lot of coaching helped them but if you haven't got it to start with all the coaching in the world ain't gonna help. Look, you're holding the world by the tail. Everything you want. Enjoy it."

"What the hell am I going to do with myself all day, sleep, shop, cruise up and down that stupid Intracoastal Waterway on the yacht?"

"Boy, let me tell you something. There must be a

thousand women who would give their right arms for that kind of dull life. Look, I'm not going to argue with you. The movies is out. Forget it. I don't wanna hear no more about it. Go on, get outta here. Go shopping. I got things to take care of."

She shopped with a vengeance, regularly. Her extravagance didn't make a dent in Perrini's bankroll. If she shopped every hour of the day around the clock, every day in the week, what she could spend wouldn't equal a day's take of Perrini's income. He himself didn't know how many millions he was worth. At a rough estimate, he figured it to be around two hundred million dollars.

Harriet allowed her mind to dwell on the millions. If something should happen to Angelo she would come into all the millions stuffed in the two safes in the home, and in several safety deposit boxes under fictitious names. As Angelo's widow she would have the right to those boxes and their contents. Then there was the home, the cars, the yacht, the art works she had purchased.

It was something to think about. She thought about it a great deal when Vito Marrone came into the Organization. She noted the way he looked at her the first time they met. The hunger in his eyes for her was



almost lustful. She shivered a little as she let her mind dwell on how it could be with him. He was young, her age, handsome as she was beautiful, full of an animal vigor. She knew, however, that he would only look and hunger because he didn't want to hazard his position in the mob. In time—that was it, time—his compelling desire for her would make him throw all caution to the winds.

Meanwhile, she would help him a little to make up his mind. When she knew he was coming to the mansion she would dress so that her full-bosomed figure with its slender hips and long legs was revealed in all its insolent and wanton lushness. She would

smile at him in a way that insinuated a promise of what he believed was impossible to attain. Her own senses reeled when she saw the way he looked at her.

About two weeks before Angelo's meeting with the three men, he told her of the huge shipment of heroin.

"I'm gonna make millions outta this, honey," he said. He was highly elated. "The whole boodle goes to the boys in Chicago. When this deal is closed I'm gonna let you to to Tiffany's with a shopping list. How's that, huh?"

"I can hardly wait. When will the stuff come?"

"It's on the way. On a ship called the *Blue Swan*. The stuff is packed in dolls. Some dolls, eh?" He laughed. "Beautiful dolls. Just like you."

He reached for her and pulled her into his arms. She suffered his love-making even though it repelled and nauseated her. She closed her eyes and imagined herself in the arms of Vito Marrone. It helped a little.

All that day the information Angelo had given her filtered through her mind. She was impatient with herself because she felt there was a key to her plan in this shipment of narcotics, but what, how to find it? Her mind roamed through the dimensions of probability that would militate against Angelo.

No good, damn it! And then a name hit her. Mike Shayne. The private investigator. She had read of him several times. She dressed for the street, went downstairs and told Angelo she was going to Bal Harbour.

"I saw something in Nieman-Marcus the other day I liked. I'll be back in a couple of hours."

"Sure, honey. Don't spend too much. Not over a million." He laughed at his own sally.

She found a street phone, parked, and called Mike Shayne. "I have some information that I think you'll be able to use. What? My name doesn't matter, Mr. Shayne. The *Blue Swan*, a ship somewhere in the Mediterranean right now with ten million dollars worth of heroin stuffed in dolls. That's right, Mr. Shayne, ten millions. I'm sorry, that's impossible. Perhaps some time later. Good day."

Shayne thought for some time about what he had just been told. He asked himself why the call had been made to him instead of to the police or the feds.

There could be only one answer. Fear of being discovered as the giver of the information. That meant he had to keep it confidential. Now, who would have that kind of information, and why would she want to give it away? Revenge? Jealousy? Hell hath no fury like a woman

scorned. Could be. Now, to whom was the shipment consigned? If he learned that he would have a pretty good idea as to who the woman was who dared to double-cross someone awaiting ten million dollars worth of heroin. There were some provocative angles in the whole thing. There were bound to be more, of that he was certain.

He called the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. "This is Mike Shayne. Who am I talking with?"

"Hi, Mike. Larry King. What's up?"

"Larry, I've got some pretty strong information about a shipment of narcotics. Ten million dollars worth. Scheduled for delivery to Miami." He filled King in with the name of the ship. "Somewhere in the Mediterranean. And with so many millions at stake it's worth taking seriously. There's nothing to lose and a heluva lot to gain."

"Sounds pretty straight. The opium is bought in Iran or India, processed in Casablanca or Algiers and shipped into France or Italy from where it is moved into this country. I'd say, right off, that the *Blue Swan* is headed for France."

"Cherbourg or Bordeaux?"

"No, I don't think so. There are hundreds of quiet ports where fishing boats put in. It will

most likely be one of those. However, the interception will have to be made on the open sea. International waters. We'll notify Interpol and the French Department of Drugs. We'll also have one of our destroyers give them a little help. Who's your informant, Mike?"

"Sorry, Larry, no can do. Wish I knew—but it's just a voice over the telephone. You can say the information came from me directly. Don't mention any informant. That could result in a quick killing."

"Will do. Keep in touch."

The *Blue Swan* was intercepted, searched, and the cache of dolls stuffed with heroin found and confiscated. The captain of the ship was placed under arrest and interrogated. He admitted nothing. The bill of lading showed that the shipment of dolls was consigned to a John Caduto in Marseille.

Caduto, a Mafioso, had been deported from the United States four years before and had been active in the world of narcotics and tied in with Luciano and Genovese when both were alive. Caduto was arrested in Marseille. The Trans-Atlantic telephone wires began to burn up.

Angelo Perrini received his first call hours after the *Blue Swan* was intercepted. The conversation was in coded Italian.

"There's been a leak, Angelo. The *Blue Swan* taken. The stuff confiscated. Who talked?"

Perrini swore. "Who talked?" he yelled back. "You ask me who talked? Ask yourself. You, the clever Giuseppe Gagliardi, who knows all. Ask yourself!"

"Angelo," Gagliardi replied coldly, "I am not in a mood for your sarcasm. Save that for your stupid soldiers. The Syndicate has lost a million dollars."

"So have I, dammit! I paid in advance. There will have to be retribution."

"Don't talk like a fool, Angelo. You took the same risk as all of us. There will be retribution as soon as we learn the name of the informant. You will be contacted later."

Perrini received his second telephone call the next day. This time from Salvatore LaMondi in Anzio.

"Angelo," LaMondi said, "you are familiar with one Mike Shayne in Miami?"

"Mike Shayne? No. Who is he?"

"A private investigator."

"I can check on him quickly."

"Kill him!" LaMondi ordered.

"He is the informant."

"But how?"

"We don't know. We shall find out, however. Johnny Caduto has been arrested in Marseille. Interpol is holding him in high bail. We are trying to

effect his release. We will be in touch."

Two days later, Perrini received his third call. This time from Antonio Marcella from Palermo.

"Angelo," Marcello said, "there is a man in your city named Oreste Manzo. He fled Sicily and went to New York City. He is connected with a band of young birds, brigands, in Brooklyn. He is in your city to take over. About a dozen of these birds are with him. We suspect him as being the informant. Kill him."

"How will I know him? How will I find him?"

Marcello grunted. "Look under your bed! What kind of fool are you? You have a hundred men on your payroll. Send them all out to find him. He loves the bright lights and the girls. My advice is that you find him quickly and waste him before he does it to you. We expect a report in the next few days. One more thing, the second shipment is being held up until this thing is settled. We will inform you further."

III

MIKE SHAYNE received the second telephone call from the same woman. He debated with himself how best to handle this threat on his life. First of all, the

pieces of the puzzle began to fall into place. He knew that he couldn't take this warning lightly. Vincent Corrazo wasn't nicknamed 'Trigger-Happy' for nothing, and Don Fresco was just as deadly. If they had been given a contract on him then it was dollars to doughnuts they were out looking for him at this very moment.

The redhead wasn't brash enough to try to handle this alone. There were a dozen or more ways in which they could position him. They were experienced killers and they would make sure the first time. He decided to get a little help locating the gunmen before they got to him. He called Sergeant Jorgensen at the Miami Beach Police Department.

"Jorge? Mike Shayne."

"Yeah, Mike, what can I do for you?"

"There's a couple of Perrini's gunmen looking for me. They've got a contract on me."

"You drunk, Mike?"

"Sober as a judge. This is straight information. Vincent Corrazo and Don Fresco. Can you have your boys pick them up? They'll very likely be carrying rods so you can hold them on a gun charge. I'll want to talk to them when you pick them up, that is, if they don't get to me first." He paused. "Can do?"



"Sure. Who's your informant?"

"No can do now, Jorge. There's some big things brewing. As soon as I find out I'll fill you in."

"Mike, are you withholding information the police should have? I don't want to think that?"

"No, Jorge. It's all in the problematical stage. Ties in with that *Blue Swan* confiscation of heroin the feds nailed."

"How do you fit into the picture?"

"I gave Larry King the information."

"So?"

"So the word got out I was the big mouth. That's easy to

figure. Why else would Corrazo and Fresco have a contract on me?"

"Did that shipment belong to Perrini?"

"I wouldn't doubt it but it can't be proved. Unless, and that's a big if—my informant knows and will be willing to testify."

"I think you should level with me, Mike. There will be holy hell to pay if things break loose and you didn't come clean."

"Jorge, I don't know. I'm leveling with you. As soon as I get any more information I'll pass it on. Meanwhile, pick up those two gunsels."

"All right, Mike, I'll send out some men. Be careful."

"I will. So long."

Shayne checked his gun, shoved it into his shoulder-holster and went out. He looked up and down the street, saw nothing suspicious, went to his car, raised the hood. No bomb. He got in and drove to Collins Avenue, then north to South Ocean Boulevard, pulled into the parking lot of the Statesman Hotel, parked and went into the cocktail lounge. There were two men sitting at one end of the bar. Shayne sized them up. Guests. He took a stool at the opposite end of the bar from where the two men sat.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Shayne. The usual?"

"No, Mac. I want some information," he said in a low voice. "I saw a sharp young guy here with a redhead a couple of nights ago. He was sitting at the farthest end. You know who I mean?"

"I think so, Mr. Shayne. A dangerous guy. I wouldn't want to get involved."

"You won't, Mac. I know who he is. Vito Marrone. I want to know where he lives. Can you help?"

"Why don't you go next door to the Statesman Towers? Manager's name is Al Wexler. He might be able to help."

"Thanks, Mac, I'll return the favor some day."

"Mr. Shayne—"

"Yeah, Mac?"

"I didn't tell you a thing."

"Of course not." He slid off the stool and went out. He walked through the parking lot to the Statesman Towers. At the desk, a young, attractive brunet smiled at him.

"May I help you?"

Shayne grinned. "In more ways than one. You're Sheila?"

"No," the young woman smiled back, "I'm Mary Lou, young, pretty, engaged, and I use Pond's. Now, what can I do for you?"

"I'd like to talk to Mr. Wexler."

"He's busy. I'm his secretary. I take care of all his unimportant

business. You have some unimportant business?"

"No, doll, this is important. You ring Mr. Wexler or go into his inner sanctum and tell him there's a good chance this place is apt to fall down around his ears in short time unless he comes out to talk with me." He grinned again, spread his hands. "See, doll?"

"Just like that, huh?"

"Just like that."

She shrugged. "Well, I suppose it's my duty to save this place from falling down around Mr. Wexler's ears." She gave him a sidelong glance. "Hmm, you just don't look the type, but then you never know, do you?"

"I found that out long ago."

She turned away from him, walked into a glass-enclosed office. A minute later, a tall, good-looking young man in his early thirties came out.

"I'm Mr. Wexler. What can I do for you?"

Shayne showed him his identification. "That is confidential. Can we talk in your office?"

"Yes," Wexler replied a little nervously. "This way, please." In the office, Wexler pointed to a chair. "Sit down, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne sat down. "I'll come right to the point, Mr. Wexler. You have a tenant in the building named Vito Marrone?"

"Yes. A very quiet, refined

gentleman. Doesn't mix with any of the other tenants or guests. He's lived here for three years, pays on time, on the dot, never any trouble with him."

"You read the papers, Mr. Wexler?"

"I glance through them. Why?"

"This very quiet, refined gentleman is one of the slickest hoods in the country, a killer, Mr. Wexler. He's with the Syndicate. Ten, twenty men, maybe more."

"That's pretty difficult to believe. My information is that he's the son of a very wealthy merchant in New York, an importer. He lives here in Hollywood because he has an asthmatic condition."

Shayne grinned ruefully. "Importer is right. Only it's not his father but Angelo Perrini. You've heard the name before?"

"I've seen it in the papers, I believe."

"Perrini runs the rackets in all of Miami, the Beach, Hollywood, Fort Lauderdale, and up and down the coast. What he imports is heroin. Vito Marrone is one of his enforcers. Does that surprise you?"

"Very much. Now, what is it you want of me?"

"I want to save you a lot of trouble. If Marrone is arrested it will be big news in all the papers. You having him here as a

resident will give the place a very bad name and possibly cause a mass exodus of your tenants. That might also cause you your job. I wouldn't want to see that happen."

"I appreciate it. You still haven't told me what you want of me. What is it you want?"

"I want to talk to Marrone."

Wexler was thoughtful. "I don't particularly like that. The very trouble you say you want to avoid for me could happen in your talk with Mr. Marrone. Why can't you talk with him somewhere else?"

"I could, but there isn't time to choose a time and place. You see, Mr. Wexler, two other hoods in the same gang have a contract on me. I want to find them before they find me."

"A contract? I don't understand."

"They want to kill me."

Wexler went a little pale. "I—I just don't know what to say, Shayne. This is a very exclusive apartment building. Most of the tenants are professional people, doctors, artists, writers, and some of them are retired, older people I can't afford to excite. You're placing me in a very awkward and untenable position."

"On the contrary, Mr. Wexler, that's exactly the kind of position I want to avoid for you. I could bring the police in here

with a warrant. Mr. Marrone would be taken to headquarters in a police car. Would you prefer that?"

"Of course not." He sighed. "Mr. Marrone is in the penthouse. I have your assurance there won't be any kind of disturbance?"

"None whatever. Thank you, Mr. Wexler."

Shayne took the elevator to the penthouse, pushed the bell. There was an immediate answer.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Mr. Marrone, I'd like to talk to you. Assistant manager."

"Just a minute." There was a short wait and then the door was opened. Marrone stood there in blue silk pajamas and a silk dressing gown of the same color.

"May I come in?"

"All right, come in. What's the problem?"

Shayne sized him up. Five-ten or so, about a hundred and sixty, with a face women would find extremely handsome if one didn't see the fox-like look. They were in the living room. The row of wide windows faced the ocean. The apartment had obviously been done by a professional decorator. It reeked of style and money, a bachelor pad designed to impress and snare the susceptible female. He was a lady killer all right, all the way from zero to a hundred.

Shayne said, "I lied to you,

Vito. I'm not the assistant manager."

Marrone's expression didn't change. "So you're not the assistant manager. Don't keep me in suspense. Rock Hudson? Burt Reynolds? Christine Jorgenson? No, that was the other way around. So, who the hell are you?"

"Mike Shayne."

Marrone grunted. "Mike Shayne, eh? You sonofabitch! I gotta hand it to you. You've got a lotta guts. How'd you find me? There aren't half a dozen people know where I live."

"You've got friends, Vito. They don't want to see you get into trouble. One of them gave me your address. Nice layout. Papa Perrini must pay you well."

Marrone went to a divan and sat down, crossed his legs. "All right, you got in, Shayne. What do you want? Make it quick, and make it good. I don't have too much patience. Besides that, you give off an offensive odor."

"Vito, you've come a long way from opening doors and running for coffee and sandwiches. Unless you're smart, you're going to find yourself in a little six by eight cell, eating food that will gag you, and wearing coarse clothing that will make you itch. Perrini has put out a contract on me. Corrazo and Fresco."

Shayne took a shot in the



dark. "The fuzz know about it. They also know the guy whose contract you got. Where's Corrazo and Fresco?"

Marrone let out a mirthless laugh and stood up. "Shamus, you not only have the guts of a burglar but gall too. Where's Corrazo and Fresco? First of all, I wouldn't tell you the right time. Next, I wouldn't give you a drink of water to save your life if I owned all the water in Florida." He turned away, his face hot with anger, whirled back.

Shayne knew he had shaken him up. The raging wrath of the man told him he had lost his cool completely.

Marrone said, "You think you've got a lot of information. A contract on you, a contract I've got on somebody you

haven't named. On the basis of that, you want me to tell you where to find Corrazo and Fresco, eh? If you find them, by yourself, that is, what have you got on them? Nothing, Shamus. Nothing but conversation. What are you going to charge them with—carrying concealed thoughts?"

"How about conspiracy to murder? And you're in it, neck deep. The fuzz have got enough evidence to make it stick and to put you away for about five years, as a starter. There are a few other little items. Transporting stolen property across a state line, the Kaye Jewelry job; labor racketeering; smuggling of narcotics, another federal offense; and for closers, income-tax evasion. How does all that strike you, Vito?"

"I'm trembling. Who the hell do you think you're talking to, some gunsel? The fuzz put me in the can and I'll be out before they turn the key on me."

"Not on a charge of murder, Vito. Nick Peters, Harvey Webster. Celia Adams, the waitress who was fatally wounded the day you shot and killed Bob Russell in the Mayfair Restaurant. There were witnesses who were afraid to talk then but aren't now."

Marrone laughed hollowly. "Shamus, if the fuzz had all that, I wouldn't be standing here right

now. I'd be in one of those six by eight cells you paitned for me. Talk, talk, talk! Let me tell you something, Shamus. You think Corrazo and Fresco have a contract on you? Leave town. Those guys don't miss. So long, Shamus. I'm a little tired of your chatter."

He went to the door, opened it, and stood there. "Get out, you sonofabitch!"

At the door, Shayne said, "You'll change your mind. Call me when you do. The number in the book."

When Shayne left, Marrone picked up the phone and called Perrini's private number. Harriet answered.

"Vito, Mrs. Perrini. Is Angelo there?"

"No, he isn't. Why don't you come over and wait for him?" Her voice was low and sultry, her tone insinuating the invitation he had waited so long to receive.

Despite his anger and irritation, he felt a hot trembling gush through him. "All right. In an hour."

Shayne stopped by the desk to talk with Al Wexler. He said, "I had a very cordial chat with Mr. Marrone. There was no trouble of any kind. As a matter of fact, he was very cooperative. You see, Mr. Wexler, your fears were groundless."

"I'm happy to hear that. I was sure there was some mistake."

"There is. I am confident it will all be straightened out. I want to thank you for your cooperation."

"Not at all, Mr. Shayne. If I can be of further help I shall be glad to do so." He nodded to Shayne and went back into his office.

Mary Lou came to the desk. "So, a private eye, huh? I should have guessed it. And you were after that nice gentleman Mr. Marrone."

"I didn't say that. I told Mr. Wexler I only wanted to talk with him. I found him completely charming. I think some of it wore off on me. Are you really engaged, or was that merely a feminine ploy to get rid of me?"

"Do you want to hazard a guess?" She grinned impishly.

"You're not engaged."

"Right. I'm married. My husband is a former line-backer for the New York Giants and picks me up every evening at six o'clock."

"I don't believe it. Let me pick you up at six o'clock. I know a nice quiet place where we can have a drink and talk about the next moon shot."

"That sounds intriguing. The one thing I've always wanted to discuss with a big, handsome redhead private eye was the next moon shot. I'll be ready."

"Is there a public telephone around here?"



"Yes, around the corner, to your right."

"Thanks."

Shayne went to the phone and dialed Sergeant Jorgensen. The detective answered almost immediately. "Jorge? Mike Shayne. Any news on those two guys?"

"Not a thing, Mike. I've got six men out looking for them. All the usual places. No one knows anything about them. Or, if they do, they aren't talking. They've really got everyone scared. My men mention their names and all they get is a blank look. It may take a day or two but I'm sure they'll nail them. Where are you now?"

"In the Statesman Apartments on South Ocean Boulevard

in Hollywood. You know the place?"

"Yeah. What's there?"

"Vito Marrone. I had a nice little talk with him."

"And came up with a blank, eh? He's a rattlesnake, Mike. Uses a stiletto. We've been after him for a long time but can't get him. He's slick. Leaves no clues."

"I left him with a lot of problems and probabilities. He just may decide to play ball in order to save his own dirty neck. It's happened before."

"Okay, but keep your eyes open. Corrazo and Fresco may be out looking for you right now. They'll shoot just as soon as they see you, even if you're in your car and doing eighty. All the patrol units have been alerted. They have their descriptions. The trouble is that we don't know the kind of car they're driving. I would guess a four-door sedan, Caddy, Buick, or Olds. Then again, you never know. They may be using a pogo stick."

"Very funny. I'll be on the lookout for it. Two men on a pogo stick armed with machine-guns."

"Just take it easy and don't make any wrong turns. We'll pick them up sooner or later."

"You better make it sooner. I've got a date at six o'clock."

"I might have known. Okay. Keep in touch."

IV

VITO MARRONE arrived at Angelo Perrini's home an hour later, drove to the back of the house, around the curving driveway, and parked. He was alive with anticipation. His heart beat faster. That invitation in her voice. It could mean only one thing.

Harriet Perrini met him at the door. She was dressed in shorts and a thin blouse, and Marrone sensed that there was nothing underneath but the warm pink and creamy flesh that had excited him for the past five years. Harriet took his hand and led him into the living room.

"Angelo is in New York. He flew there this morning. A big meeting with the bosses. He won't be back for a couple of days."

Vito Marrone looked around questioningly.

"I gave the cook and maid the rest of the day off, told them I would dine out or fix myself something. Vito—" She moved into his arms. A hoarse cry escaped his throat and he crushed her to him, covered her mouth with bruising, searching kisses.

"Vito," she murmured, "Vito... Vito..." She turned from him and ran up the stairs. He followed her, his heart pounding. At last. All the want

and heat he had known when he looked at her would come to an end. They were in one of the guest rooms. She was in his arms, all that glorious softness of her, her face against his, her lips brushing his lightly, teasing, demanding.

"Vito," she moaned. "Vito!"

The light and shadows in the room faded and turned into living heat, red, orange, purple, and the sounds that came from their lips were hollow and strained.

Hours later they were in the living room. Harriet poured two drinks, handed him one, and they sat in large comfortable armchairs across from each other. Harriet's eyes were smoky, the moist mouth half open, tell-tale evidence of the emotion-packed experience she had waited so long to know. She thought of a line she had once read. Men think they seduce women when it is women who seduce men but allow them the pride of conquest.

Vito Marrone was flushed with a strange happiness. All the strain and tension he had known completely dissipated. He was a man enveloped by a warm lassitude, at ease with the world, Mike Shayne forgotten. He raised his glass toward Harriet and took a long, slow drink, his eyes never leaving hers, sighed, and leaned back in the chair.

Vito Marrone had come from the streets of Detroit, in the dirty, harsh tenderloins—Jewish, Negro, Italian—around Twelfth Street, Linwood Avenue, Dexter Boulevard, and in Greek Town in the shadow of police headquarters.

He had been a pickup man for a numbers syndicate, a steerer for crooked gambling joints, a dope pusher. He hated the men who used him and swore that one day he would be on top, bigger than any one of them.

When the cops turned the heat on the town he fled the city. He feared more than death itself the prospect of a prison cell. He had been picked up once for investigation and held in the city jail for twenty-four hours before being released. He was like a wild animal suddenly caged.

When he left, he headed for Chicago. No one wanted him. St. Louis. The same thing. He headed south and wound up in Miami. There he met Vincent Carrazo, who introduced him to Angelo Perrini. He was on his way.

Harriet's eyes never left Marrone's face. She was waiting for that precise moment when, she felt, he would be responsive to what she had to say. Marrone finished his drink and Harriet stood up.

"Vito—"

He looked at her, a smile breaking the corners of his mouth. He expected anything but what she said, the bomb she threw at him that brought him to his feet, the glass he held falling from his hand.

Harriet's tone was low but firm. She said, "It was I who told Mike Shayne about the narcotics shipment."

"What the hell are you talking about, Harriet?" he exploded. "Do you know what you're saying?"

"Yes, Vito, I do. I'll repeat it. I told Mike Shayne about the narcotics shipment."

He stared at her, still unbelieving what he had heard. He felt his hands shake. "You finked on Angelo?" he asked incredulously. "You did that?"

"Yes, Vito," she answered calmly, "I finked on Angelo."

"And you told him Carrazo and Fresco had a contract on him?"

"That too."

"And that I had a contract on Oreste Manzo?"

"No, not that?"

He turned away from her, paced the room several times, turned back to her.

"Thanks," he spat out on a caustic note. "Why did you spare me? No," he half shouted, "not for that. Or did you?"

"No, Vito, not just for that. I want you always. You and me.

Don't you understand? I don't love Angelo. I never did. I can't stand it when he touches me. The first time I saw you I knew that we belonged together. I sensed it right away. It took a long time but we finally made it. Now, we can go all the way. With Angelo out of the way everything will belong to me. To me and you. You can be the big boss, number one. Isn't that what you've always wanted?"

"You're asking me to fink on Angelo too? Is that what you're asking?" he demanded. He waved a hand. "Hell, don't you know that as soon as the Syndicate boys found out about that, in New York, Buffalo, Cleveland, Chicago, St. Louis, Las Vegas, or Los Angeles, I'd be dead faster than you can say a two-letter word. Yes, and you, too."

"No, Vito. Not the way I see it. You don't have to fink on Angelo."

"No? Then what the hell do I do?"

"Don't kill Oreste Manzo. That's all you have to do."

"Yeah? Then what?"

"Oreste Manzo will kill Angelo. The word is out that Manzo is looking to take over."

"If he kills Angelo, he will take over."

"No, he won't. You're Angelo's lieutenant. You'll be the one to take over, the logical one. You'll have a hundred men

behind you, and Mike Shayne and every cop in Miami, the Beach, and Hollywood."

"Mike Shayne?" Marrone shouted. "He's a cop. Besides, how the hell do you expect me to stop Corrazo and Fresco from carrying out their contract? What do I tell them, that you and I are planning to take over and we need Shayne's help?" He ran a hand through his hair. "Why the hell did you have to tell me this, anyway?"

"Because I want you always, Vito. Do I need a better reason? Listen, Angelo is due back a day after tomorrow. He'll be coming in alone. He drove to the airport and parked the car there. He'll be driving back home alone. What could be easier? You find out how I can get in touch with Oreste Manzo and I'll do the rest."

"He'll kill you too."

"He won't know it's me. You didn't know I gave Mike Shayne the information about the narcotics shipment or the contract on him. I know how to handle this." She went to him, stood very close to him. "Vito," she said softly, "it's your big chance, our big chance. If Manzo kills Angelo before Corrazo and Fresco can kill Shayne then you can cancel the contract. Shayne will take care of Manzo."

"How?"

"I'll take care of it. Trust me,



Vito." She moved closer into his arms, pressed herself against him. The desire for her flamed through him again.

"It's dangerous, Harriet. If you make a mistake it will be curtains for both of us."

"I won't make a mistake, Vito. Trust me. Trust me, Vito." She kissed his mouth. "You and me, Vito. Trust me."

His arms went around her. He was torn between two worlds, the code he had lived by all his life and the deep hunger to be somebody big, somebody important, and to have this woman always, this woman who held his emotions by the throat, who was

fire and passion and food for his hunger.

What else? he asked himself. Satan is a woman, and a woman with greed in her heart will double-cross God even when He proffers her a golden apple. Yet, there was a chance that it could succeed. If it did, he would be where he had dreamed of being all his life, a final escape from the poverty he had known, the broken home, a drunk for a father, and a mother who left them both because she could take no more of the bitterness of her life. He said, "I'll find Oreste Manzo."

"Not yet, Vito," she murmured. "I don't want you to leave like this." She took his hand. "Come, darling. Come." Still holding his hand, she led him up the stairs.

V

MIKE SHAYNE picked up Mary Lou at six o'clock. He drove to a plush cocktail lounge in Fort Lauderdale where he knew the owner and the two bartenders. When he entered the lounge he was met by Chick Davis, the owner.

"Hi, Mike. Glad to see you. A table?"

"Yes, Chick." He turned to Mary Lou. "This is Chick Davis. Chick, Mary Lou."

Mary Lou smiled in greeting, and Davis said, "My pleasure."

They were given a table in the corner away from the door. A waitress came over and took their orders.

"It's a lovely place," Mary Lou said. "You come here often?"

"Yes, when I want to get away from the usual crowds in hotel lounges."

"Bring all your dates here, I presume?" She smiled wickedly but without malice.

"Only the special ones. Like you?"

She made a wry face. "I hate being categorized, even in a special class. However, I'm not offended."

"I'm glad. I'd like us to be friends. I need your help."

"So that's it! I believed it was only my company that you wanted. That's rather discouraging to a susceptible and romantic young woman." She put a hand to her breast. "I hear the tinkling sounds of a fragile heart breaking. Where in hell are the drinks?"

The waitress appeared just then and set down the drinks, a scotch and water for Mary Lou and a cognac for Shayne. Mary Lou raised her glass.

"To a dismal end for all men who lead impressionable girls astray, and you better drink to that."

"I have joined forces with you. To all men."

"To their dismal end."

"To their dismal end."

She said, "How can I help, Mike?"

"This guy Vito Marrone. I presume you know no more about him than did your Mr. Wexler."

"You said 'did'. Does that mean he knows more now?"

"I gave him some information. Marrone is a killer for Angelo Perrini, the Mafia boss in this town and points north, south, east, and west. Two other hoods in Perrini's gang have been ordered to kill me."

"Oh, Mike!" She put a hand to her throat. "But why?"

"It's a long story. What I have to know, and I have to know it quick, is whether these two men who are out to kill me will come to see Marrone. One is short, stocky, swarthy, in his mid-thirties. That's Vincent Carrazo, also known as 'Trigger Happy'. The other man is Don Fresco, also known as 'The Snag'. He's about thirty, about six feet tall, slim, almost emaciated in appearance. Looks like a junky who needs a fix. The nervous type. Has a habit of scratching his nose. Ever see them around the building?"

"Yes, come to think of it. Frequently."

"What I have to know is very

important to me. It could mean my life. If they should come into the building, and they would come to see Marrone, I'd like to be notified at once. Would you call me at my apartment if they should come into the building?"

"Would I get into trouble, Mike? Gangsters, and killers. I'm really a very timid person."

"Not at all. No one will ever know. All you have to say to me when I answer is, 'Your package has arrived.' Just that. Nothing more. If anyone should overhear you they would believe you were notifying a tenant of a delivery of some kind."

"Mike, I'm scared, really scared."

He put a hand over hers. "No one will ever know, Mary Lou. If you think you'll need protection I'll arrange to have a detective from the Hollywood precinct sit in the lobby."

"Oh, no, that would make it worse. I'll do it." She gave him a weak smile. "If the mob gets me, promise me you'll take care of Mervin."

"Mervin? Your son?"

She managed a light laugh. "No. Mervin is a cute little Yorky, a yorkshire terrier. He's timid too. You will take care of him?"

"Scout's honor. Look, if I should happen to be out when you call, I'll give you the number of a sergeant of detectives. Call

him. You can use the same code. I'll give him the information. His name is Jorgensen. I'll write it down for you."

He extracted a card from his wallet and wrote down Jorgensen's name and telephone number, handed it to her. After you've made the call, either to me or him, tear up the card and throw it away. Okay?"

"I shall tear it up into tiny, itsy bitsy pieces and swallow them. Isn't that the way they do it in the movies?"

"With a chaser of cyanide. Good girl. How about dinner? The food here is very good."

"After what you've told me, I'd gag on the sight of a single baked bean. No food, Mike. May I have another drink?"

"Another dozen or two, if you like."

"I may take you up on it. If ever I needed to get stinko, this is it." She raised her empty glass. "Here's to the CIA and 007."

"I think I better order you a double."

"A triple, Mike. You only live once. Oh, gracious, I think that's a horrible thing to say. Forgive me if I burst into tears."

Shayne drove her home an hour later. He took her to the door and they both stood there for several seconds. She looked up at him. "You're a nice guy, Mike. Take care of yourself." She raised her head and gave him

a quick kiss on the cheek, and then she was gone.

He drove back to Hollywood, parked in front of a bar near Young's Circle and went on. He found the phone booth, dialed Jorgensen's number.

"Glad I caught you in, Jorge. Any news?"

"Nothing yet, Mike. Those guys are as slippery as eels. We've tried to find out where they live but have come up with a blank. We had a previous address but they moved from there about six months ago. Where are you?"

He told him.

"I'm going to send a couple of men over to your apartment to look it over and to stay there, one at the front and the other at the rear, just in case."

"Thanks, Jorge. I won't be going home for about another hour."

"Just the same I'm sending over a couple of men now. Call me when you get home."

"Will do. Thanks again."

"What are friends for, Mike?"

"I'm grateful. So long."

VI

WHEN VITO MARRONE left Harriet he drove into Miami, stopped at several bars, asked questions. In the seventh place he stopped he hit pay dirt. The bartender was a little reluctant at first.

"KILL MIKE SHAYNE!"

Marrone folded a hundred-dollar bill into a square and held it in the palm of his hand. "That and a favor from me when you'll need one. Where does Manzo live?"

The bartender took the bill. "Crescent Arms Apartments. 408. I delivered liquor to him a couple of times. Don't put me on the spot, Vito. I've got a wife and three kids."

"Your name will never be mentioned. And you forget I talked to you. Is that straight?"

"Couldn't be straighter. You meant that about a favor?"

"Try me."

"Thanks, Vito."

Marrone drove to the Crescent Arms Apartments, took the elevator to the fourth floor, found 408, and listened at the door. There was no movement inside. He took a set of keys from his pocket and fitted one into the door. The lock turned. He went in, looked around, saw the telephone on a stand, walked over to it and wrote down the number.

He walked out into the street, got into his car and drove back to the Statesman. When he got there he telephone Harriet.

"Okay, I've got it. He gave her the address and the telephone number. Now what?"

"Leave it to me, darling. I'll take care of it from here."

"What do I do, twiddle my

thumbs?" He was a little furious with himself for having placed himself in the position of having to take orders from a woman. "Hell," he said to himself, "This is one helluva woman!"

Harriet Perrini waited about an hour before she called the number Marrone gave her. There was no answer. She tried again a half-hour later and this time she got an answer. The voice was harsh, gruff, with a heavy Italian accent.

"Who this?"

"I'm a friend, Mr. Manzo. I want to give you some information."

"Who you are, eh?"

"That doesn't matter. Just listen. I don't have much time. I want a thousand dollars for what I'm going to tell you."

"A thousand dollars, eh? Very important information, eh?"

"That's right." She didn't expect that he would pay the money and didn't want it. This was merely her way of disguising her real identity. "You will mail the money to me in care of General Delivery, Miami Beach Post Office. My name is Ruth Reid." She spelled out the name.

"Okay, lady, I got it. Now, what you got to sell?"

"Angelo Perrini will be coming in from New York Thursday. He'll be coming in on Flight 51, National Airlines, and the arrival time is 4:25 in the

afternoon. Is that worth a thousand dollars?"

"Lady, I don't know who you are but you just made yourself a grand. Why you don't let me buy you a drink and I give you the grand in person, eh?"

"Thank you, no. Just mail it."

"Okay, Lady. You need a favor sometime, you call me, eh?"

"I'll do that."

She never bothered to check the post office so she didn't know that Manzo had actually put a thousand dollar bill in an envelope, written Ruth Reid on it and mailed it.

At ten o'clock that night she called Mike Shayne and found him in. She said, "Mr. Shayne, this is your friend."

"Hello, friend. I've been waiting to hear from you. I appreciate the information you gave me but I need little more. Can you give me the addresses of Corrazo and Fresco?"

"I'm sorry. I don't know that. I may be able to find out later. If I do I'll call you. But I don't think it will be necessary."

"You mean the contract on me has been canceled?"

"No, it hasn't. They're still out looking for you. However, if you will be in your office at precisely four o'clock on Thursday I'll give you some important information that may solve your dilemma."

"Four o'clock on Thursday. You wouldn't be setting me up, would you, friend?"

"Mr. Shayne, I'm disappointed in you. Would I have given you the information about the threat on your life in the first place?"

"No, I guess not. Okay, friend. Thursday afternoon, four o'clock. I'll be there."

"Will you be able to get in touch with your friends at police headquarters in a hurry when I call you?"

"Of course. Why?"

"I think you'll need them. Good-by, Mr. Shayne."

"Wait!" The click in his ear told him she had hung up. He swore aloud. He went over in his mind each word she had said to him. He was more certain than ever that his caller was Harriet Perrini. But why was she going to such lengths to protect him? It didn't make sense. And yet, it had to be.

The unpleasant odor of a double-cross assailed him. Who in the hell was she after? She was playing a dangerous game, the double-cross of a Syndicate hood. For a man to play it would be fatal. For a woman! Cripes! The vicious gangsters would torture her sadistically before they killed her.

There were fragments in the puzzle he couldn't piece together. If she were Angelo

"KILL MIKE SHAYNE!"

Perrini's wife it was possible she was setting him up.

Ten million dollars in narcotics. Only a couple of men in the country could handle that kind of deal. Perrini. Okay, that was one piece in the puzzle. Somehow, Perrini had learned that he had fingered the shipment. That would explain the contract on him. Another piece in the puzzle. Corrazo and Fresco were Perrini's boys. That was the third piece. The puzzle began to take shape, to form into a face, a pattern. Some essential pieces were missing. Why would she want to set up her own husband? She had everything she wanted with him. Luxury dipped in whipped cream. He kicked himself mentally.

"Shayne, you stupid fool!" he said aloud.

He had a mental picture of Angelo Perrini, big, coarse, ugly, at least twenty or twenty-five years older than Harriet. Hell, Perrini must be all of fifty-five. Harriet couldn't be more than twenty-six. He thought then of Vito Marrone. Handsome. Harriet's age. When he had asked her what Marrone was in on, she had said, precisely, word for word, "I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne, but that's all the information I can give you for now."

It had to figure. Marrone was in on it, up to his ears. It still didn't make sense to him. How



in the hell did they figure to get rid of Perrini?

The big guy was no fool. What he lacked in looks he more than made up in brains and intelligence, in criminal cunning. He didn't get to where he is on just muscle, although he had a lot of that too. If Harriet and Marrone were plotting to get rid of her husband then there had to be a third person in on it, the killer with the contract on Perrini, because Marrone wouldn't put himself in that position. The Syndicate would order him killed in short order.

He thought of going back to the Statesman Apartments and trying to squeeze some sweat out

of Marrone but dismissed the idea. Marrone didn't scare easily. Any guy who used a stiletto to kill his victims had to be possessed of a ruthless cruel streak that didn't bend too much to threats. Talking to Marrone would be a waste of time, unless you had him cold on the final payoff—Murder One—and would trade.

As he thought of Marrone he told himself he would prefer to put him away in a cell for life rather than give him an out for information or testimony that would break up the Miami operation. Vito Marrone was a slimy character. And Harriet Perrini was no better, if she were in on it, and he told himself there was little reason to doubt that she wasn't. That tantalizing body and beautiful face masked something dark in her character. In checking on her, he learned she had divorced a good-looking young and brilliant scientist in order to marry Perrini. That spelled greed. It was all he had to know about her.

He called Jorgensen at headquarters. "Jorge, Shayne. Listen, I think I've got something hot."

"Mike, from where I sit, you've got enough heat on you already. Are you at home or in your office?"

"It's almost eleven o'clock, Jorge. What the hell would I be doing in my office?"

"You're liable to be doing anything. I'm just checking. My men are still posted, front and back, outside your apartment. What's up?"

"Can you have a squad car at my office on Thursday at four in the afternoon? No later. Must be there at four."

"That's a day after tomorrow. Okay. What's the deal?"

"I don't know, but I have a hunch things will break wide open then. Your best men, Jorge."

"We'll be there. Nothing yet on Corrazo and Fresco. They're a couple of slick guys. They must have spotted the cover on you and are just biding their time."

"Do you have any idea about where Mr. Big might be?"

"Perrini?"

"Yeah."

"Why? How does he fit into this?"

"I'm not sure. I've got a hunch he's being set up for the kill."

"No big loss. Who do you figure?"

"I don't know that either."

Jorgensen grunted. "Somebody's going to kill somebody, but you're not sure either about the intended victim or the killers. That's just the kind of case the boys in the D.A.'s office like to handle."

"Don't get irritated, Jorge. I said I had a hunch. We'll know

for a certainty on Thursday. Meanwhile, can you check on Perrini?"

"I think I've got a vague picture. You figure Perrini put out the contract on you because of the narcotics deal. That sounds reasonable. Corrazo and Fresco are Perrini's enforcers. That adds up. It's not a certainty, but it has strong possibilities. Now for the joker. Who wants to kill Perrini, and why?"

"I'm not sure. That's the missing piece in the puzzle. If we knew that we'd know which way to jump."

"Okay. You want me to check on Perrini. Are you saying that you think he's already been hit?"

"It's a possibility."

"If so, it could mean one helluva gang war with a lot of killings. Do you have any idea who might be wanting to muscle in?"

"Nope. Could be internal."

"Hmm. Only one name springs to mind—Vito Marrone. How do you figure it?"

"Like you do."

"No use picking him up. He'd be out in five minutes. What makes you think things will break on Thursday?"

"My female friend, if you'll excuse the expression. I'm almost certain she's Harriet Perrini. Very cunning trick."

"Hell, this whole damned

business is beginning to sound like a Perry Mason case of intrigue. When it breaks, we'll find an English butler and a Russian maid plotted the entire thing. Okay, Mike. I'll check on Perrini in the morning. I'll send a couple of men over to ask a few questions. Good night."

Jorgensen called Shayne the next morning shortly before noon. "Perrini is out of town, Mike. Mrs. Perrini said she didn't know where he went except that he left several days ago and she didn't know when he would be back. Does that mean anything to you?"

Shayne thought for several moments. "Hard to say. Is he really out of town or has he already been knocked off? Look, Jorge, check with all the airlines. Find out, if you can, if Perrini booked a flight somewhere. Tell you what. I'll call Eastern and National. You call the others."

"Okay, Mike. I'll get on it right away."

Shayne got in touch with the P.R. man at Eastern, explained the situation. He drew a blank. He struck pay-dirt at National.

The P.R. there told him, "Yes, Mr. Shayne, a passenger named Angelo Perrini booked a flight on Monday to New York."

"Is there a return reservation in his name?"

"Nope. Nothing."

"Try it for Thursday."

There was a wait of several minutes. "Nothing, Mr. Shayne. No, nothing booked. Sorry, that's the best I can do."

"You've been very helpful. Thanks a lot."

"Not at all. Any time."

Shayne called Jorgensen after he hung up. "Jorge, Perrini booked a flight to New York last Monday on National. They have no record of a return flight. Now what?"

"I don't know. If Perrini is going to be hit it will mean that someone has information on when he's going to fly back. Since there's no record of a return reservation how the hell would anyone know when he's going to come in? I don't know, Mike. I think you hunch is wrong. It just doesn't make sense."

"Maybe it does. Suppose Mrs. Perrini knows? Suppose Angelo told her the day he was coming back, and the time? Would that make sense?"

"It could. But I still can't figure her wanting to get him knocked off. What does she stand to gain?"

"Vito Marrone; young and good looking. Marrone and all of Perrini's money and holdings is one helluva trade for an ugly, coarse old man. Perrini is all of twenty-five or thirty years older than Harriet. How does that strike you?"

"I don't know, Mike. The whole damned thing is giving me one big headache. Why don't we just wait and see what develops? You're going to get a call from this dame, whoever she may be, on Thursday. Let's wait."

"Jorge, you're liable to get a killing or two that's going to put a lot of heat on the town. You want to stop that, don't you?"

"Hell, yes. But what do you think I am, a mind reader? Everything is strictly conjecture. The important thing now, if your caller is right, is to pick up Corrazo and Fresco, before they get to you. That's the only killing I'm interested in. Check with my men. Don't go out until you have them look over the street."

"Okay, Jorge. We'll leave it at that."

CONTINUED

VII

A BOUT FIFTY feet from the entrance to Mike Shayne's apartment a black Cadillac sedan parked shortly before nine o'clock in the morning. At sub-machine-gun across his lap, was Vincent 'Trigger Happy' Corrazo.

"I'm pretty tired of tailing this guy," Corrazo said. "The second this fink shows his kisser I'm going to blast him."

"Play it cool, Vince. We have to make this clean. It's a busy

"KILL MIKE SHAYNE!"

street. We don't want to hit a few innocent citizens. We can catch him in a spot with nobody around."

"Two lousy days!" Corrazo spat out. "Nobody knew where he lived, and he never showed at his office. That secretary of his is pretty cute too. Wouldn't tell you the time of day."

"You don't blame her, do you? What the hell, nobody knows where we live either. What time is it?"

"A quarter to twelve. Your watch stop?"

"I left it on the bureau. When's Angelo coming back?"

"He didn't say. The boys in New York are pretty hot over that shipment of H. Ten million dollars! Cripes. What we couldn't do with that kind of bread."

"It isn't only the boys in New York. Chicago, Italy, France. I wonder how Vito is doing with the hit on Manzo? You think he got him?"

"You know as much about it as I do. Vito is pretty sneaky. I'd hate to have him after me. They don't call him 'The Shadow' for nothing. Right now, I'd be willing to lay even money that Manzo is stiff as a board somewhere."

"I think you'd have a winner, if you had any takers. We better get this shamus before Angelo gets back or he'll be spitting fire."



"We'll get him," Corrazo said confidently. "This little friend on my lap is fully loaded and I'm going to empty it into that fink's heart. Twelve o'clock. You sure he's in that apartment?"

"Positive. Straight information."

In his apartment, Mike Shayne checked his gun, shoved it into his shoulder holster, put on his coat and went down into the lobby. Detective Arnie Leib was sitting in a chair near the door. He got up when Shayne appeared.

"Where to, Mike?" Leib asked.

"My office."

"Wait a minute. Dave Penner is at the back of the building. I'll go get him. Our orders are to tail you any time you go out. Wait right there."

Leib and Penner returned a

minute later. Leib said, "Dave, go out and check the street."

Penner went out and returned a couple of minutes later. "Seems to be clear. There's a black Caddy sedan parked about fifty feet up the street. Doesn't seem to be anyone in it. Do we go?"

"Why not," Shayne said.

"Okay," Leib said, "but don't do any fancy driving. Don't try to beat any traffic lights because we want to be right behind you. Okay, let's go."

Shayne got into his car, started it, waited for Leib and Penner to start their car. He moved out of the driveway slowly, Leib and Penner about twenty feet behind him. As he passed the black Caddy Corrazo snarled an oath.

"That's him! Move, Don. Stay right behind him."

The Caddy snaked out from the curb in front of Leib and Penner, got within fifteen feet of Shayne's car. Corrazo raised his weapon.

"Not yet!" Fresco yelled. "There's a Mercury behind us with a couple of guys in it. Could be fuzz."

"I'll take them too! Stay right behind this guy. This is it!"

"Wait for a spot, Vince," Fresco urged. "Too much traffic here. We could be hemmed in."

"Okay, okay. Just don't lose that fink!"

"Don't worry about it, and don't get trigger happy," Fresco said.

Corrazo grunted. "Yeah, I know. Everybody thinks I go nuts when I pick up this baby. I haven't made a mistake yet."

"Yeah, sure, except one or two."

"Just drive, Don. Never mind the wise cracks."

From right in back of them, in the Mercury, Leib said, "That's our team, Dave. Now what?"

"Stay behind them."

"Don't you think we ought to pick them up here? They might start shooting, hoping to get Shayne through that rear window of his car."

"Nope. If we stop them now all we'll be able to hang on them is an illegal possession of a firearm rap. I want to get them with the big one, attempted murder."

"Our orders are to protect Shayne, not to nail Corrazo and Fresco."

"Adds up to the same thing. I'm going to get the other units in on this." He picked up the phone. "This is car 38, Leib and Penner. We're tailing Corrazo and Fresco. They're on Shayne's back. Request supporting units. We're on Collins and 183rd. Urgent. Confirm."

He got an immediate response. "Units 16 and 45 have

your call. They are moving in. Over."

Shayne glanced into his rear view mirror and saw the Caddy behind him. He recognized Fresco at the wheel. He had only a partial view of the man in the rear seat but was certain it was Corrazo. He looked for Leib and Penner and caught a glimpse of them as he passed 175th Street. He took the gun from his holster and laid it between his legs.

Traffic was heavy on the street, vehicular and pedestrian. He believed that Corrazo wouldn't try to get him on a busy street. First of all, it would impede their getaway. Next, they wouldn't want to endanger the lives of motorists or pedestrians. The heat would really be on them. He wanted to give them a chance to try for the kill, however. It was the only way they could be put away for a long time.

He kept his speed at the legal limit, passed 159th Street and was on the clear road toward Haulover Beach Park to his right. An island separated the road. No pedestrians or traffic to his right. If they were going to try for him, this would be it.

"Okay, boys," he said aloud, "this is it, the big play, the bomb, the touchdown run." He stepped on the accelerator. The needle moved to forty, fifty, and sixty. The Caddy moved with

him, and behind the Caddy, the Mercury with Leib and Penner. Behind the Mercury were two marked police cars, Units 16 and 45.

Penner picked up the phone. "Unit 38 to Units 16 and 45. Do you read me? Good. Keep your positions. The action hould come about here. Follow Plan B. Over."

In the Caddy, Fresco was staying cautiously behind the redhead, waiting to make his move. Corrazo said, "Okay, Don, move alongside. Quick! I'm going to turn this baby loose. When I do, gun this heap to the limit and wing away!" He slid over to the right side of the car, poked the machine-gun through the window.

Shayne noted the move. He took his foot off the accelerator and began to brake easily, and as the Caddy's nose reached the rear end of his car he braked hard. At the same time, Corrazo squeezed the trigger of the machine-gun and a spray of heavy caliber slugs shot harmlessly past Shayne toward the Intracoastal Waterway about a half-mile away.

The three police cars roared past him, sirens wide open, guns blazing away at the Caddy. Several slugs hit the gas tank. The Caddy turned sharply to the right, careened down the embankment that led to the park,

bounced out of control. Shayne was behind it. The three police cars turned into the curving driveway, down the road toward the golf course.

Fresco leaped out of the Caddy and started to run toward the Waterway, Shayne behind him. When he was a few feet from Fresco he made a diving tackle at Fresco's knees and brought him down.

"You lousy fink bastard!" Fresco swore.

Shayne pushed the snarling face into the dirt and held it there. Behind him, Leib, Penner, and four other cops were yanking Corrazo out of the Caddy. Leib shoved him against the car, shook him down, pulled the hood's arms behind him and cuffed him. Two of the cops ran toward Mike Shayne. They handcuffed Fresco and threw him into one of the police cars. Leib put Corrazo into the other police car.

"Take them in. Book 'em. Attempted murder. Assaulting police officers. and for closers, speeding, endangering human lives, wanton use of firearms, and then notify the FBI. They'll take care of that illegal possession of a machine-gun. That'll be good for about twenty-five years."

A large crowd gathered. Golfers, tennis players, men and women who were waiting to board the fishing and pleasure

boats. Vehicular traffic stopped on both sides of the road beyond. Police cruisers began to move the cars.

"Okay, folks," Leib said, "it's all over. You can go back to your games. Break it up, please."

Penner turned to Shayne and grinned. "A close call, eh?"

Shayne grinned back. "Yeah, you guys really play it close, and I mean *close!*"

"Well, we figured you would be able to outthink those two bums."

"Thanks. For your information, I get a little upset at times when someone's turned a machine-gun loose on me. That thing wasn't throwing confetti, you know."

"If we figure the range of that machine-gun, chances are a few of those slugs bounced off the heads of some startled fish. You okay otherwise?"

"I will be after I've swallowed about a pint of cognac."

Penner motioned to Shayne. "Jorgensen wants to talk to you, Mike. Here." He handed him the phone.

Jorgensen said, "Got 'em, eh, Mike?"

Shayne sighed heavily. "Yeah, Jorge. It was one helluva show."

"What now?"

"Nothing to do but wait until tomorrow at four. That is, if this little caper doesn't change my friend's mind."



"I don't think so. I think this was a part of the plan. Well, we'll see. Where are you going now?"

"To my office. I want to assure Lucy Hamilton I'm okay."

"Call her, Mike. We'll want you to come down and sign a complaint. Attempted murder. I've already talked with the D.A."

"Can he hold those guys without bail?"

"No. But I'll guarantee you that the bail on all the charges will be about a million dollars. And that's not including the federal rap for illegal possession of a machine-gun. You can bet on it that those two will stay in the can until they go to trial. After that, curtains. You coming down?"

"In about an hour."

"Okay. Keep your eyes open. This may not be over for you yet. I told Leib and Penner to stay with you."

"Okay, Jorge, it's pretty late in life for me to have baby-sitters but why argue?"

Jorgenson laughed. "That's right, Mike. Why argue?"

Shayne drove on to his office. When he came in, Lucy Hamilton, his attractive secretary, looked him up and down and clapped a hand to her forehead.

"What train hit you?"

"I was playing tag with a couple of hoods, or maybe you

could say I was playing football because I made one helluva tackle on one. A perfect shot, right at the knees. The bum didn't gain a yard."

"That's a very interesting story. And now, if you please, the translation."

"Corrazo and Fresco, Angelo Perrini's two enforcers." He gave her all the details. "They're going to get more time than they can do, or so Jorgensen assured me."

"Oh, Mike," she said with concern, "you could have been killed. Why did the police let it go that far?"

"So they could have enough on them to get them off the streets for life. Those two have been responsible for about a dozen killings in this town but there was never enough evidence to convict. Now they have it. Any calls? Important ones?"

"Well, yes, I think so. A woman called, said her name was Mary Lou and would you please call her when you came in. I asked her for the rest of her name but she said that you would know." She looked at him with a sidelong expression. "Mary Lou. A new conquest?"

"She's doing me a favor."

"I'll bet. Well, don't keep the lady waiting. She must be a step away from the telephone, her heart beating wildly, every nerve end shivering."

"You know what, Miss

Hamilton," Shayne replied, "you have a very lucid and perverted imagination."

She laughed. "Look who's talking. And don't tell me I'm acting like a jealous female. My interest in you is platonic and motherly."

"Okay, Mother, get me the Statesman Apartments in Hollywood. Ask for Mary Lou. She's the manager's secretary."

"Humph! They have feelings too. Where do you want to take the call?"

"In my office."

The phone rang a few moments later. Lucy said, "Line two, Mr. Shayne." She was very heavy on the Mr. Shayne bit.

"Thanks, Lucy. You can hang up now." There was a loud noise and Shayne knew she had banged down the receiver. "Hello, Mary Lou?"

"Yes, Mike. I thought you might want to know this. A dark-haired young woman, very chic went up to Mr. Marrone's apartment about an hour ago. She's still there. This is the first time I've ever seen her here so I thought it might mean something to you."

He knew immediately. Harriet Perrini. "Yes, it does, Mary Lou. Thanks for letting me know."

"There was something that came over the radio on the 12:30 news. Your name was mention-

ed. A shooting. I was quite upset about it."

"I'm all right," he assured her.

"Did it have anything to do with what you told me?"

"Yes. Those were the two men who were given the contract to kill me. They're in a nice cozy cell right now."

"Do be careful, won't you?" Mary Lou said.

"I always am. Thanks for being worried. I like that. I'll call you as soon as this business is straightened out."

"I'll be waiting."

She hung up and Shayne sat there thinking. He rubbed his right shoulder. There was a numbing pain there. "Must have sprained it," he said half aloud. He decided to call his friend, Dr. Julian Sterling, and have him check it out. His mind went back to Harriet Perrini and Vito Marrone. He was more certain than ever now that those two had hatched the whole plot, and it was one helluva plot.

So far, everything added up to nothing. Or did it? What was behind Harriet Perrini's warning to him that he was marked for death? Why had she gone that far? First, the information on the narcotics deal, and then the warning. What was she really planning for him? That was the fly in the ointment. Right now, he knew enough, if he could prove it, to put her away for

about ten years. Hell, no! Everything she had done so far was to aid the police. Anyway you looked at it, officialdom would award her a medal. She was cute, all right.

He slapped a hand down on the desk. Why the hell couldn't he figure it out! It was there, somewhere. He went back over everything in his mind that happened. It came to him at last. The key was Perrini. If Harriet and Vito Marrone were planning to knock off her husband, and he was pretty sure at this moment that they were, then there would be nothing else in their way. How were they going to do it? When were they going to do it? Who was going to do it? Three questions. No answers. Tomorrow at four. It was a long wait. He called Dr. Sterling, made an appointment for late that afternoon, got up.

In the outer office, he said to Lucy Hamilton, "I'm going back to headquarters to sign that complaint. I won't be back."

"Give Mary Lou my fond regards."

"You keep on fretting about Mary Lou and you're going to get an ulcer. Why do women have to chitter and squeak about things that are only in their minds?"

"Men!" she shot back, and turned her attention to the letter in the typewriter.

VIII

THE D.A. said, "Mike, you're going to have to testify in this case. These two hot shots are Perrini's men. They'll stop at nothing to beat the rap. They'll have the highest priced lawyers in town to fight this. They'll get a friendly judge to reduce the high bail we're asking, and they'll be out on the street looking for you. I was thinking of protective custody."

"Get it out of your mind, Nate. If you want my testimony you'll let things ride, so far as I'm concerned. I can take care of myself."

"Where would you be now if it hadn't been for police help? These babies would have cut you in half with that machine-gun," the D. A. said.

"So, you can have Leib and Penner tail me."

"There were three shifts tailing you and on duty at your apartment. That's a lot of cops we can't spare."

"I've got a little information for you, Nate. It's my feeling that things are going to break in this case tomorrow afternoon. When it does, you won't have to worry about those two babies, or me."

"Are you withholding information?"

"Not a damned bit. Sergeant Jorgensen knows all about it.

You want to know about it, talk to him."

"Why don't you tell me?" the D. A. asked.

"Look, Mr. Mazer, I've been very cooperative so far. Don't push it. You'll get all the information your office is entitled to, at the right time. I have an appointment with a doctor. Anything else?"

"Okay, Mike. We'll leave it like it is for now."

Dr. Sterling's office was near the Statesman Apartments. Reba Sterling, the doctor's wife, was in the office when Shayne got there.

"We heard the news on the radio, Mike," Reba Sterling said. "We were quite concerned. Are you all right?"

"My shoulder hurts a little. Other than that, I'm okay."

"Sit down here, Mike," Dr. Sterling said, "and we'll have a look." He probed the shoulder. "Nothing serious. A pulled muscle, a little strain. Do you have a hot water bag?"

"Nope. I'll get one."

"Keep the heat on it for a couple of days and don't do anything strenuous that will irritate the condition."

"Okay, Doc."

"Why don't you come up to the apartment for a drink, Mike, when you can spare us about ten minutes? Or for dinner?" Reba said.

"I'd like that. I'll give you a call in a day or two."

"You do that, Mike," Dr. Sterling said. "We see you so seldom these days."

"I'll try to correct that." He kissed Reba on the cheek, shook hands with Julian and went out.

He stopped in at the Statesman Apartments. Mary Lou was behind the counter, at her desk. She motioned to him to come into the office.

"She's still up there," Mary Lou said. "You did want to know?"

"Yes, I did. Look, I'm going to wait in my car. I want to take a look at her, to be sure she's the one. I'll call you."

"Okay, Mike. Be careful."

"I will be. Thanks again."

He moved his car to the parking lot in front of the building and leaned back against the seat for a long wait.

About an hour later, Harriet Perrini came out alone. He recognized her immediately. She was someone you couldn't forget. She got into a Cadillac convertible and drove off. He followed at a discreet distance. It was a waste of time. She drove straight home. Shayne drove back to his apartment, took off his coat, shirt, and T-shirt, got a heavy towel, ran the hot water on it, wrung it out, and applied the towel to his shoulder.

After several applications he



dried himself, went into the living room, poured out three fingers of cognac, drank it down, and threw himself on the bed. He was asleep in minutes.

He was awakened several hours later by the ringing of the phone. He picked up the receiver.

"Mr. Shayne?"

"Yes."

"This is your friend."

"Yes?"

"I'm merely checking to be sure you will be in your office at four o'clock tomorrow."

"I'll be there."

"I heard about your close call. That was unnecessary, wasn't it?" I mean, you could have had those men picked up before they almost killed you. If they had succeeded, it would have spoiled everything."

"What is it they would have spoiled, friend?"

"You'll know tomorrow. Good night, Mr. Shayne."

He replaced the receiver thoughtfully. Tomorrow. Four o'clock. He glanced at his watch. Seven-thirty. He got up, took a quick shower, changed clothes, and went out to dinner.

The next morning Shayne awoke shortly before nine, and called Sergeant Jorgenson. "Jorge? Shayne. You all set for today?"

"Yep, Mike. Four o'clock. I'll have two units at your office. Leib and Penner, and Foster and O'Larry. I'll be in another car to direct operations, if necessary. You'll be in yours?"

"Yes. Nothing to do now but wait."

"Where are you?"

"In my apartment. I'll be leaving for the office in about an hour. I want to be there just in case my friend has a change of plans."

"You still don't know what it is?"

"No more than you do. I'm betting it has something to do with Angelo Perrini. Can't be anything else. I've looked at this from every angle and that's the only answer I can come up with."

"A hit?"

"That's it. Okay, Jorge, see you at four."

About fifteen minutes before four, three unmarked police cars pulled up in front of Shayne's office and parked. Jorgenson came in, and behind him Leib, Penner, O'Larry, and Foster, four of the best detectives on the force. Lucy Hamilton gasped.

"Hey! What is this, a raid?"

"Hello, Lucy. No, not a raid. Mike in his office?"

"Yes. Go on in. I'm sure he must be expecting you, all of you. What's up, Sergeant?"

"Nothing to be worried about, Lucy." Jorgenson went into Shayne's office together with the four detectives.

"Take some chairs," Shayne said. "Ten minutes."

The officers took chairs, lit cigarettes and waited. Five minutes to four. Three minutes to four. Four o'clock. No call. Jorgenson and Shayne glanced at their watches, looked at each other, shrugged. Two minutes past four. Still nothing. Five minutes past four.

Jorgenson started to say something when the telephone rang. The six men moved to the edges of their chairs. Shayne picked up the phone.

"Mr. Shayne?" the voice asked.

"Yes." Every sense was suddenly touched with an electric wire that sent quick messages to his brain. There was

silence for several seconds. "Yes?" Shayne said again.

"Mr. Shayne, Angelo Perrini is coming in on Flight 51, National Airlines, from New York. A man by the name of Oreste Manzo is going to kill him. He'll probably have several men with him. Hurry!"

"Mrs. Perrini? Harriet Perrini?" The click in his ear told him it was no use. She had hung up. He leaped from his chair. "Angelo Perrini. A man named Oreste Manzo has a contract on him. Let's go!"

The six men piled out the door. Jorgensen said, "Manzo. We've had our eyes on him, Mike."

"You should have picked him up!" Shayne shouted back. "He's here on a fake passport. Wants to take over."

"Where the hell are we going?" Jorgensen yelled.

"The airport! National Airlines!"

The three police cars opened their sirens, Shayne behind them. He thought! *She really figured this out to a T. In this traffic it'll be a miracle if we can get there in time.*

The police cars sped to the 79th Street Causeway, picked up the 1-95 Expressway and headed for the airport. Shayne glanced at his watch. Four-fifteen. Not a chance. The police cars were running wide open. They came

to Bird Road, sped on the Red Road. Four twenty-five. They came to N.W. 7th Avenue and turned left toward the airport. Four-thirty. They were halted by a stream of cars.

All the sirens were on full blast. Cars moved out of the way, but slowly, too damned slowly. Shayne cursed. Too late. Four-forty. They came to the door of the National Airlines station, and all six men leaped from the cars.

Shayne and Jorgensen hurried to the baggage area. Perrini was nowhere in sight. A crowd gathered outside the door of the National Airlines station. The police officers there were having a difficult time in dispersing the mass of people and in getting traffic moving.

"Where to now?" Jorgensen yelled.

"The parking lot. Let's go!"

Outside, Jorgensen flashed his badge.

"The keys are in the cars. Move them if you have to," he told a cop. "Not too far. We'll need them in a hurry!"

"Yes, sir. They'll be right here."

"Separate," Jorgensen ordered. "Search the area."

As the six men moved in different directions there was the sound of gunfire, one, two, three, four shots.

"Over there!" Shayne yelled.

The five detectives ran to where Shayne stood. He pointed to a blue Continental sedan. "Right there!"

"That's Manzo," Jorgensen shouted, "in the black sedan. Leib, you check Perrini. Come on," he ordered the others, "we can block off Manzo!" They hurried to their cars.

Shayne yelled at Jorgensen's back. "I'm going to get Harriet!" Jorgensen didn't answer. "If she's still alive!" he finished.

He reached his car but the others were already speeding toward the exit and Manzo's black sedan.

Shayne raced out of the airport, hit a traffic jam, cursed, sped around it as cars honked at him in protest. He made it to Bal Harbour in forty minutes, turned onto Pinetree Drive, pulled up in front of Perrini's home and leaped out. He ran to the back of the house, tried the door. It was open. He went in, alert for the slightest sound. Silence. He looked through all the down-stairs rooms. No one. He went up the stairs, halted at the top, listened. No sound. He turned right. As he did so he heard a movement behind him, wheeled.

Vito Marrone stood there, a stiletto in his hand, a leer on his face. He moved like a cat toward Shayne, a springing leap, a jungle animal whirling through the air toward its kill.

Shayne half-turned as Marrone sprang toward him, caught the hood with a chop across the neck, grabbed the hand that held the stiletto and twisted it. A bone broke at the elbow. Marrone dropped to the floor. Shayne ripped off his necktie, pulled Marrone's hands behind his back and tied them while the hood screamed in pain.

He hurried to the bedroom in the direction from which Marrone had come. Harriet was on the bed. Her eyes were wide open. There was a neat hole over her heart from which a thin trickle of blood oozed. She was dead.

Shayne picked up the phone on night-table, called headquarters. "This is Mike Shayne. Has—"

"Just a moment, Mike," the desk sergeant said, "Jorgensen wants to talk to you."

"Put him on."

"Mike? We got Manzo and two of his hoods. Perrini is dead. Where are you?"

"At the Perrini residence. Mrs. Perrini is dead. I've got that gunsel Marrone tied up. Better send the wagon and notify the boys from homicide."

"We'll be right out. What's the address?"

Shayne gave it to him.

The homicide detectives arrived with Jorgensen, Leib, and Penner. They took charge of

Marrone, cuffed him, and two detectives hustled him out.

Lieutenant Frank Graham, head of the homicide bureau, asked Shayne how he happened to be in the house.

"A hunch, Lieutenant."

"I'll want a little more than that, Shayne. You know, like what gave you this ESP hunch, huh?"

"It's a long story, Lieutenant. Suppose we clean up things here and I'll go down with you and make one statement to you boys and the D.A. How's that?"

"It'll do."

In the D.A.'s office, Mike Shayne made his statement before Nate Mazer, the D.A., Lieutenant Graham, Jorgensen, and a stenographer who took it down.

"I first got a call from Mrs. Perrini about the narcotics deal. I didn't know who she was at the time. I thought then that it was an informer wanting a percentage of the value of the stuff. Then, she called me to warn me that I was slated to be killed by Corrazo and Fresco. I began to put two and two together and figured the only one who would have that kind of information would be someone close to Perrini himself.

"A woman? It had to be his wife. I then learned that she was playing cozy with Vito Marrone. Again, the numbers added up.

Marrone, young, good-looking, Perrini's right-hand man, was more her style than an aging Perrini. I then figured that she and Marrone were working together. She tipped me to Manzo because she wanted him out of the way. He represented a threat to her plans, the takeover of the local Syndicate that she planned for Marrone."

"Okay, so far," Lieutenant Graham said, "but why should Marrone want to kill her?"

"Well, he must have figured that any dame who would double-cross her husband would double-cross her lover and pick up all the marbles. With Harriet out of the way, no one could lay a finger on him for the whole deal. She was too dangerous to him to allow her to live." He spread his hands. "That's about it."

"What do you figure she would have done about Marrone if he hadn't killed her?" District Attorney Nate Mazer asked.

"Hard to say. She might have gone along with him. Then again, if she met someone she liked better she would have had him hit. That was what Marrone feared. In effect, she was a Queen Bee, up to a point."

"And that point?" Lieutenant Graham asked.

"The male was deadlier than the female."

The World's Second Oldest Profession

"Double-cross me?" The big man laughed, pulled a wicked little .38 from his shoulder holster. "I am a good friend, a very bad enemy. You will not be the first man I have killed—nor the last!"

by JOHN REESE

THE HORSES were still ten yards from the wire when Pel began tearing up his ticket. It was only the fourth race, but he turned to go. He bumped into a tall man in a top-coat and snap-brim hat, and excused himself.

"Quite all right!" the man said, smiling. "I too go blind when I lose. What did you have?"

His voice was deep and resonant, his accent just British enough to be both attractive and a trifle phony. He towered over Pel a good six inches, yet he did not look bulky. He had a harsh, big-featured face with prominent cheekbones, deep-set eyes and a long, slanting jaw.

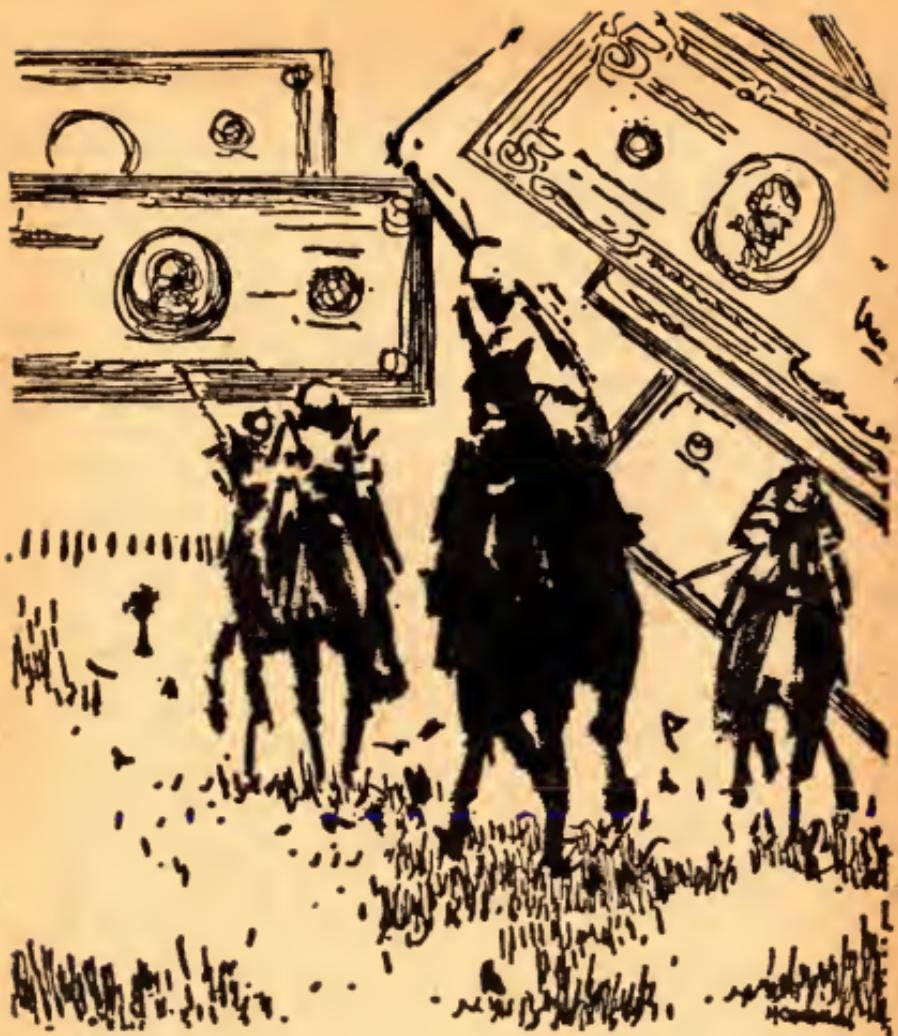
Pel knew instantly that he had never seen the man before, yet somehow he still felt he knew him.

"I have no idea," he said. "I never bet. I was just bored stiff and picked a horse blindly."

"I love the horses!" said the stranger. He glanced at the tote-board, which had just flashed the winner. "There, I've ninety-odd dollars to collect. If you can wait, I'd like to buy you a Martini to minimize your pain."

"Thank you, but I really must go."

The stranger took a firm grip on Pel's arm. "Nonsense! You're the first chap I've spoken to since I



came to Los Angeles, and I really insist. Beautiful track, isn't it? I've always wanted to see Santa Anita, and I've won nearly two hundred. Please, old man!"

Pel had him placed now. This was no chance meeting. How long

the stranger had followed him, waiting for the opportunity to turn on that rugged, domineering charm, he had no idea. But he was sure that, under his fine topcoat, the man wore a shoulder holster with a hand-made Pirisch .38, of which

there were not more than a dozen in the world. They cost \$1,200 each in Switzerland, and were enormously in vogue in the world of espionage and counter-espionage.

The Smith and Wessen .38 that regulations insisted that Pel wear made him feel cheap and dowdy. He decided to take it out and polish it up a little tonight, but meanwhile, he might as well see where the fellow was going.

Five minutes later, seated in the clubhouse with a drink each, they were fast becoming old friends.

"It's a hobby of mine, to deduce the professions of people from their appearance," said the stranger. "Would I offend you if I told you yours? Let's see, it's something artistic yet well-paid—you've prestige as well as a sensitive talent. I've got it!"

"What?" said Pel.

"You're head of the English department at a fine college—no doubt an exclusive school for girls."

"Nothing so interesting. I'm editor of a dinky little trade magazine, that's all. Nothing literary."

The stranger's face fell. "Still, it's not entirely a miss. Myself, I'm afraid I'm a bit of a tramp. Played some professional golf, flew in a few wars, but that's work and work is dull, eh? If it weren't for the horses, I might have to find a real job. Ghastly thought!"

Pel's next line unreeled before him as though he were reading a

script. "Sounds like an ulcer way to make a living, betting the horses."

"Not the way I do it!"

"Don't tell me you have a system!"

"In a sense. I rely on a computer. A horse race presents a limited number of relational factors, which is where the digital computer is at its best. It's no better than the information given it, and one doesn't always win. But I follow the rules, and in the long run it pays handsomely."

"Really!"

"Yes. But there really are rules. One—bet only when the computer is sure. Two, always bet the same amount—in my case, fifty dollars per race. So long as you don't unbalance the odds by hunch-betting, the computer will be on your side. I find I win four-point-six out of seven-point-one bets. That's a handsome profit margin."

"Sounds incredible," Pel murmured.

"Oh no! I'll give you an example: The next race is no good. The computer could reach no firm conclusion. But in the sixth, the machine was sure and the odds are attractive. How about betting ten dollars yourself?"

"No. I only came here because somebody gave me a pass. I'm not a gambler."

"Girl trouble?" the stranger said softly. "Really, I'm afraid it shows."

"My wife left me."

"Please forget my intrusion! I—

I lost the one woman myself. One is never the same, is one? The dreary days, the somber nights—God help us all!"

Shortly the stranger excused himself to place his bet on the sixth, but he showed no interest in watching the race. They sat chatting in the clubhouse until it was over. Then the stranger reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a \$50 ticket on the winner. It was worth exactly \$715.40 at the window, but he did not seem to be elated by his triumph. Perhaps he was remembering the one woman.

They parted then. The stranger showed no interest in where Pel worked. But he did proffer his business card, which identified him as Eric Jordan-Carpenter, technical consultant for a diesel engine firm in Coventry, England. There was nothing Pel could do but hand over his own card. Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter glanced at it, pocketed it carelessly, and gave Pel his huge, strong hand to shake.

Back in his office, Pel tried to think what to do. Was this really a feeler, or had he become so security-conscious that he was seeing spooks? Should he report it in detail to Colonel Haygoode, or not?

If he was right, he decided, he would be hearing from Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter again. Plenty of time then to free the hounds.

Pelton Parmer was editor of the *Icalbar Bulletin*, published monthly by Icalbar, Inc. In five years he

had converted it from a dull house organ to one of the most respected scientific journals in the world. Icalbar, Inc., manufactured exactly nothing. It was a consulting firm, one of those known in the trade as a "brainstormer." Its only clients were the department of defense and its contractors and subcontractors.

C. Holcomb Haygoode, U.S.A., Ret. was chief of security at Icalbar. He had been there only two years, and he had put the company's 9,573 employees through a whole series of fresh security examinations. Pel's had merely reinforced his conviction that he could spot an intelligence or counter-intelligence man as far as he could see him.

The miracle was not that Icalbar and similar firms were impenetrable; that simply was not true. But the other side's spies were as stupid as our own, Pel thought, wherein lay our salvation. Secrecy was like the climate in a mushroom cellar; only a fungus like Colonel Haygoode could thrive in it.

What, really, could he tell the good colonel about this afternoon's encounter? Of course he had seen Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter win sizable sums on two races. But he could have bet *every* horse, and plucked out only the winning ticket. There had been only seven horses in the fourth race and five in the sixth. That meant only a \$600 investment, even if the winning horses had paid short odds.

And \$600 was not much, if it seduced the editor of the *Icalbar Bulletin*. To Pel's office came scientific articles from all over the free world. Scientists, young ones especially, were enthusiasts. They talked too much. It was a continuous struggle for Pel to satisfy his scientific writers without giving away information that could be important—critical, even—to the free world.

Pel had started life as a mathematician, but he was not good enough to compete in the mathematical world of today, and he soon knew it. He had written a few scientific articles for the Los Angeles newspapers while still a student at California Institute of Technology. He drifted into a job as a science reporter, met and married Mercedes Pettit, a society editor, then was offered the job as editor of the *Bulletin*.

Mercedes did not thrive in the mushroom cellar atmosphere. Their last conversation had proved that.

It began with her asking Pel not to bring home any more meat-headed intelligence people.

"If I don't ask them around once in a while," Pel said, "they'll get suspicious and investigate me again. Honey, everywhere you go, you have to work with jerks."

"But only at Icalbar do you have to live with them exclusively. Darling, with your reputation, you could get a job in a minute that would

pay you more than Icalbar pays. Why do you put up with it?"

"There is such a thing as patriotic duty."

"Duty! Maybe you think it's patriotic to submit your guest list in advance, every time you have the girls in for bridge. I don't. I don't know any Red spies. I never did know any Red spies. I never will know any Red spies! Also, I don't like the way Colonel Haygoode looks at my legs."

That was that. Pel was sure that Mercedes loved her country and respected Icalbar's part in its defense. In her way, she was right.

But it was hard to break the habits of five years, hard to give up the prestige of being editor of the famous *Bulletin*, and harder still to tell Mercedes the truth. He had been offered a job as editor of the *Synthetic Finisher*, the official organ of the National Institute of Inorganic Paint, Enamel and Lacquer. The pay was almost twice what he made at Icalbar, and he would have been given a free hand in building it into the finest publication in the booming world of industrial chemistry.

But—and this, Mercedes would never understand—had he resigned at Icalbar, he would only have been subjected to more investigations. Had he had time to break this news to her, and prepare her for more idiot interrogations—

But she was gone, and here he sat, waiting for a man met at Santa

Anita to call on him. Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter did exactly that, but not too soon. Oh no indeed! One did not rush things, in the world's second-oldest profession. Nearly three weeks passed before Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter called Pel and asked him to go to the races with him.

"I'm in a bad streak, old chap, and my morale needs a lift," he said. "The computer is still with me, and so are the horses. But the damned jocks have betrayed me twice! What good are the electrons, when your boy loses his nerve and won't go inside? I need a bit of plain old luck."

"Really, I'm pretty busy—"

"Please, as a favor! Where may I pick you up?"

Pel consented. He even took out his Smith and Wesson, removed the cartridges, and made sure he remembered how to shoot the damned thing. He considered reporting to Colonel Haygoode, too, but not seriously.

He went with Jordan-Carpenter to Santa Anita and saw him win four races for a profit of \$929.50. He went again, a week later. This time, Jordan-Carpenter bet only two races, saying the machine was inconclusive on all the others. He won twice.

They had dinner together afterward. Jordan-Carpenter drank quite a bit and got a little loose-mouthed. Your man-of-the-world, soldier-of-fortune type can always



carry his liquor. If Pel had been suspicious before, now he knew.

"I've got a good bet for tomorrow, old chap," said Jordan-Carpenter. "The only thing, I can't let you bet it at the track. Odds are a bit tricky—un'erstan'?"

"No thanks. I told you, Eric, I never bet."

"Oh, everybody needs money! You don't care about—oh, linseed oil, either, do you? But if I had told you that I had cornered the market on it, and tomorrow was going to start calling in the shorts, you'd prick up your ears, eh?"

"But a horse race is different."

"It's eckshacky the shame! Just don't knock the odds down on me by betting at the track, or betting so much with a bookie that he'll lay off at the track. Lishen—El Chaparito in the third. Argentine horse, only out twice, bad luck both times, lovely odds and class of the race!"

"You seem so sure!" Pel said, as

wistfully as he could. "I've got to send my ex-wife a check next week, but maybe I could scratch up a ten-spot."

"Sure! Then sen' her a diamond ring. Sen' her two!"

They dropped it there, and each went his own way. And, shortly after midnight, Pel telephoned a friend on the overnight desk of a newspaper, and asked if Jim Leech was still on vice in the Los Angeles Police Department.

Certainly he was, the friend replied. Only he was Captain Leech now, and was commander of the University Division. The friend also provided his home phone number.

Pel Parmer phoned him, getting him out of bed. Jim Leech was just a cop. He had never rocked a single government to its unsteady foundation.

"Jim," said Pel, "what do you know about horse racing?"

"That's question number one," Leech replied, with a yawn. "Let's skip the next few and make a fast stop at about question number five, shall we?"

"All right, tell me this. With or without the aid of a digital computer, how is it possible, in an honest race, to pick the winner most of the time?"

"Not by a system, you can bet your shirt! You've got a tip. Tell me the horse, and I'll see if I can check it out."

"All right, but you'll have to

trust me. So far, this is in the strictest confidence."

An hour later, Leech called back. "I checked with the best handicappers I know. Their first choice is Sing Happy. Next best is Furtherance. The best long shot is El Chaparito. How good is he? Pel, any horse can have a heart attack and drop dead. Any jock can give him a bad ride. But if you think your tipster has good information, I'd say you've got a good thing."

"His would be good."

"That's the difference between an investment and a bet, with or without the computer. Any more questions?"

"Yes. Where can I find a bookie?"

"I suppose you have a purpose in this, other than winning a few bucks."

"I have a purpose."

"All right, go to the Corregidor Cafe, near the wholesale market. Order a cup of coffee and two pink doughnuts, and carry a newspaper opened to the racing page. I'll be interested to know how it comes out. You'll never be asked to testify, but I would like to verify what I know about this stupid operation before I have it knocked over."

Pel thanked him. The next morning, before going to work, he hunted up the Corregidor Cafe, carrying the morning paper opened to the racing news. He ordered coffee and two pink doughnuts.

"Got something good?" said the counter man.

"A good price, anyway, if I knew where to get a bet down," Pel replied.

The counter man's eyes glinted, as Jim Leech had predicted. They never could resist a sucker looking for a place to drop \$10 on a long shot. Pel got his bet down.

He was so busy making up the next month's *Bulletin* that he forgot the race until late that night. He went out for the early editions of the morning paper and found that El Chaparito had won by a length, paying \$69.25. He wondered if he would be able to collect his winnings.

He dropped in at the Corregidor the next morning, and a resentful counter man fished out a large wad of big bills, and handed them over.

Naturally, the least Pel could do was phone his dear friend, Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter, and thank him. And naturally, Eric was delighted to hear that Pel had cashed in. And no, he wouldn't mind passing on a tip now and then.

"But," he said, "let me book your bets myself. I know how to lay them off without upsetting the odds. Can't risk having your bookie go to the track and knock down the price, after you clip him a few times. You understand!"

Pel understood. How often could a spy, even one of Jordan-Carpenter's extraordinary ability, come up with a winner? By keeping the

name of the horse a secret until after the race was over, he could have a perfect record of winners and pay Pel out of his apparently limitless expense funds.

In the next two weeks, Pel booked six bets, on horses whose names he never knew until the races had been run, with Mr. Eric Jordan-Carpenter. He came out with a net gain of \$868.10.

And then Santa Anita closed. Regretfully, Eric announced that he never bet on races unless he could be there to see them run now and then. He could not move on to another track because, unfortunately, he had to keep a few stupid appointments about diesel engines.

"Well, it was nice while it lasted," Pel sighed. "I bought her a few nice things, anyway."

"Still carrying that old torch? But of course you are! We're one woman men, you and I."

They were in Eric's beautiful apartment just off Wilshire. A pair of small Cornish hens were roasting in the oven—your rugged, soldier-of-fortune types are always good cooks—and a pitcher of Martinis was near at hand.

"I guess that's true," said Pel.

"Of course it is! Let me give you a piece of advice, Pel. Don't do as I did, and let her slip away, and carry the pain for eighteen years. Win her back!"

"Oh, sure, that's all! Just win her back."

"My dear boy, when she's the

one woman, it's worth every effort. Money always helps. It's not the money, but the things it will buy that the one woman always deserves. A good fur piece. Tickets to a New York opening and a week in a good hotel there, once a year. A smart convertible, a Don Loper cocktail dress, her own credit cards—isn't this the environment she deserves?"

Mercedes? thought Pel. What Mercedes wanted was to put her feet up on a chair and read a book while setting her own hair, and enough insurance so they could afford kids.

But he clenched his hands and rubbed them as though they had dampened with sweat.

He said, "Of course it is! But what the hell, I work for a peanut outfit."

"You're underpaid, yes." Good old Eric had been baiting the trap so long that he was sweating a little too, now that he was about to spring it. "And owe them nothing, nothing! Still, my own firm does engineering, and there are others. I could get you some extra money, Pel, if you'd let me see some of the scientific stories that never get into your silly little Icalbar *Bulletin*."

"I don't think I get you, Eric."

"Every scientist in the world reads the *Bulletin*. You have an international reputation, yet you never give away trade secrets. That's fine, if you want to work for peanuts. But there is far more

money, old chap, in the pieces that never get past the censors and into print."

"You mean espionage," Pel gulped.

"I mean industrial espionage, yes. There isn't a company in the world that doesn't try to steal the secrets of its competitors. You know that yourself."

"Hold it, Eric!" Paul stood up indignantly. "In Icalbar's business, there are no trade secrets. Ours are of value only to another nation, not another company."

Jordan-Carpenter frowned and blinked in bewilderment. Then, suddenly, he threw back his head and laughed.

"Oh, you think I'm a Red spy! You amaze me, Pel. Do you imagine that the Reds are the only people who want to know what you Americans are doing? If I told you that this was Crown money, would it make a difference? I don't give a damn myself. I happen to be a loyal British subject, but I know my own worth, and Her Majesty pays me well."

Pel sat down. "Oh, then—"

"There is no ethical question between allies."

I suppose you're right, but—"

Jordan-Carpenter said coldly. "Pel, I will give you one hundred dollars in cash every week, whether or not I get anything of value from you. You are too well-informed not to know what has value, so I won't try to cheat you. Bring me some-

thing pretty good, and I'll pay you an extra hundred. Bring me something extraordinary, and I could go as high as a thousand."

"But Eric, you have no idea of—"

"Of your security precautions? Indeed I have! You can't bring out manuscripts, but you have microfilm equipment in your own office, and as a matter of routine, you microfilm every manuscript submitted to you. When a manuscript is rejected for simple lack of merit, you send it back and destroy the microfilm.

"But when some contributor has blunderingly revealed a trade secret, the manuscript is returned to the author by one of your security officers. He warns the writer and sees-to it that his manuscript and notes are destroyed. Meanwhile the microfilm remains in the files of your chief of security. What I want is just one day—a chance to see that microfilm before he gets it—before it goes from your office to his."

Pel had a few more drinks and audibly wrestled with his conscience. But weren't the British our friends? Didn't we steal their secrets too?

He made the deal.

What he did not tell Eric was that he never gave anything of importance to C. Holcomb Haygoode to read. Pel knew when a thing should or should not be published, and when a scientist did send in

something that should be classified, it was inevitably an innocent blunder that he could correct in a five-minute conference.

It was not the scientists who were to blame when this happened, but the muddled mishmash of duties exacted by security, in which the left hand knew not what the right hand did.

Twice, Pel had sent manuscripts to the colonel. Both times, investigations, grillings, lie-detector tests. Rohrshach tests, sex questionnaires and other indignities had been the fates of the unlucky contributors. Pel had barely managed to get out the *Bulletin*, and Mercedes had had to cancel a date to see a play that was on somebody's forbidden list.

"Just to show good faith, old boy, I want to give you a small honorarium to bind the deal," Eric said, handing Pel a fistful of \$20 and \$50 bills. "But just in case you ever consider double-crossing me, please believe that I am as bad an enemy as I am good as a friend."

Eric took from his shoulder holster his wicked little Pirisch .38, and hefted it in his big palm.

"Great Jehovah, a gun!" said Pel.

"Exactly! You would not be the first man I have killed, nor, probably, the last."

"Eric, if you don't trust me—"

They parted friends, Pel carrying the \$500 in easily negotiable American currency. Although it was after midnight, he went straight to Captain Jim Leech's house.

He was sure this was safe. Jordan-Carpenter would know immediately if he ratted to Colonel Haygoode. No doubt he had "operatives" in Colonel Haygoode's office, just as the colonel had a few in Eric's. This was what used to irritate Mercedes so badly—trying to remember who was loyal to whom.

But neither Eric nor Colonel C. Holcomb Haygoode would ever suspect a scientific editor of Pel's stature to know a simple, ignorant city cop.

"This could be tough," said Leech. "You think he has enough bookmaking equipment there to convict him?"

"I'm sure of it, Jim," said Pel. "He really is a devoted student of the horses, and in addition to certain other income he has, I think he probably makes quite a bit of non-taxable money, booking bets for his friends."

"Well, let me get dressed and call a couple of men. But tell me this—what's your interest in a clown of a bookie?"

"I can't tell you that, Jim. Security! You know."

"I know," the captain sighed. "But you're going to have to get us inside. We haven't got anything for a warrant, and I can't just kick in the door. How does that fit into your security situation, if I may be so bold as to ask?"

"I'll just have to take the chance."

Pel Parmer drove Leech to the

university station. There, Leech got into an unmarked police car with three detectives. The police car followed Pel to Eric's smart apartment building. The front door was locked, but Leech showed the porter his badge, and they were admitted. The officers tiptoed up the stairs behind Pel to the second floor.

Pel rang Eric's bell. He stood there a moment, his heart pounding, his scalp literally creeping. He could hear Eric coming toward the door, but he listened in vain for the click of a light switch. Eric Jordan-Carpenter was too old a hand for that! He would, out of habit, remain in a dark room, leaving any such caller vividly at a disadvantage in the lighted hall.

"Who's there?" came Eric's voice.

"It's Pel Parmer, Eric. I—I changed my mind. I want to give you back your money. I can't go through with this deal," Pel whimpered.

The door opened, and Eric said, "Oh, you changed your mind, did you? This is as good a time as any, old boy, to make it clear to you that you can't do that!"

Pel found himself staring down the barrel of the jewel-like Pirish .38. It was pointed straight at his chest, from less than ten inches away.

And at the exact split-second that Pel saw the Pirisch, Eric saw the four big policemen coming at his open door. There was no time

to close the door, but he could do one thing. He pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened. The wonderful little hand-made Pirisch, so beloved of intelligence and counter-intelligence men all over the world, misfired. Eric dropped it and used his fists. He was a good man, but not good enough to stand off one editor and four policemen for more than a minute.

Inside, they found one whole filing cabinet full of race information, including a list of some 125 of Eric's betting clients. Methodical man that he was, and typical of his mushroom-cellar environment, he had maintained records of every bet booked for the last year.

In another filing cabinet was a mass of another sort of information—codes, ciphers, rolls of microfilm, scientific publications, even a thick file of clippings from the Icalbar *Bulletin*.

"What is this junk?" said Captain Leech.

"Never mind," said Pel. "Just take the best tip anybody ever gave you, and take it out somewhere and burn it. If you ever turn it in, I guarantee you'll be filling out questionnaires on your sex habits for the next ten years."

"At my age," said Leech, "I can tell them the whole story in ten minutes. But if you say so."

One annoying load was off Pel's shoulders, but he was no closer to a solution of his most agonizing problem than ever. He had almost

been persuaded to resign, by the irksome Jordan-Carpenter business. It did not really matter for whom Eric had been spying. Seeing intelligence and counter-intelligence men daily in the office was bad enough, but when they took up his nights too, it was really more than he cared to tolerate.

Only his dread of the searching investigation that would result from his resignation kept him from turning it in and going back to Mercedes. But this, too, was settled for him by an inter-office communication that was brought to his office by a security agent. It said:

TO: Pelton Parmer, Editor, The Bulletin.

*FROM: C. Holcombe Haygoode,
Lt. Col. U.S.A., Ret.*

SUBJECT: Suspension of security clearance.

You are herewith separated from your position and your security clearance is herewith revoked. It has been brought to my attention that you recently placed a bet on a horse race at a bookmaking place called the Corregidor Cafe. Gambling is prohibited by Sec. XXIV, Paragraph 10 (c) of the Revised Security Regulations. You will therefore hand in your security badge to the officer who bears this, and under his supervision, inventory your desk before your departure. There is no appeal from Sec. XXIV, Paragraph 10(c).

Murder, He Says?

by ED LACY

*When Terror is king and Death his
slave, what follows must be evil.*



THE MAN WAS large and muscular in worn overalls and dark blue work shirt, the collar carefully starched. The swarthy face was crowded with thick features and the

contrasting blue eyes coldly stared up at a row of canned beans on an upper shelf.

The man was sprawled on the dirty floor, his middle a bright red as blood seeped from the bullet in his guts. His right hand still held a pair of large pliers.

The dull-gray gun lay on the white counter, alone and untouched, like something evil. The grocer was old, his waxy face a blotched mask, shocked paleness making his iron-gray hair seem very dark.

He lay awkwardly, half-collapsed, across a milk crate behind the ancient cash register. His eyes were shut, as if in great pain.

Outside, several patrolmen tried to keep the small, morbid crowd moving and the still night was broken by their patient: "Let's go, folks. Keeping moving. Nothing to see. It's all over. Move along. Go home now."

The two detective, both big men in their late forties, were busy outlining the corpse with a rough chalk line. Then they straightened up and Pancini of the area detective squad said, "Okay, Swenson. Tell us again exactly what happened."

The grocer's thin lips opened, showing yellowed teeth, but no sound came forth.

Roberts of Homicide added gently, "We know how hard it is for you to talk, but you must answer some routine questions. Do you

have a permit for the gun, Mr. Swenson?"

Swenson nodded, a mechanical motion. Then words came out in a hoarse, explosive gasp. "I close the store! Yes! This is too much! Six times in the last few years I been held up. A single store here, me alone. The punks think it's easy! But Manuel—my God, he must have gone crazy!"

"Crazy?" Pancini repeated. "How did he go crazy, Swenson?"

"Manuel comes in every day, sometimes twice a day. He's the janitor of one of the apartment houses. Many times we talk about things, like baseball. Or just talk. He was a good man—" Swenson's voice faded.

Pancini glanced at the clock on a neon beer sign hanging from the ceiling, then at his own wrist watch. It was nine-seventeen. He said, "You told Patrolman Brown that Manuel came in at about eight-thirty. Exactly what happened?"

"Manuel walked in and asked what he owed. He gets paid once a month and I give him credit. As I was looking up what he owed, on my pad next to the register, Manuel suddenly pulled the pliers from his pocket, told me to give him all my cash.

"I was thunderstruck. I asked, 'Is this a joke, Manuel?' 'Joke, hell! I ain't kidding, Pete,' he said. 'Give me your money or I bust your old head open.' His eyes were wild. I keep my gun under the register

and I grabbed it. My hands were shaking, so I held it with both hands resting on the counter. I told him, 'Manuel, you're drunk. Go home. Please go home.' He reached over the counter, the pliers in his hand. I fired. That's all. I close the store. I'm too old. No money is worth this! I retire." Swenson's eyes were still shut.



Roberts bent down and smelled the dead man's open mouth. "No odor of booze."

Swenson merely said, "I never saw him drunk. But he acted so wild, I thought he must be full of wine. Maybe he went crazy. Please, can I go home? I feel terrible."

"In a little while," Pancini told him as several detectives and a police photographer crowded into the small store.

One of the detectives told Pancini, "I called downtown; no yellow sheet on Manuel Ortiz. We tried talking to his wife but she's so upset all she does is cry in Spanish. Pretty gal. They have two youngsters.

"We talked to the people in the apartment house. They all say Ortiz was a good man—hard working, the best janitor they ever had. He'd been there for a year."

Roberts asked, "Mr. Swenson, was anybody in your store when Manuel came in?"

Eyes still shut, the old man shook his head. "No: Mr. Cohen was my last customer. I was getting ready to shut. From seven to eight-thirty is a long day. But no more. I'm too old. I sell the damn store!"

The detective who had been talking to Pancini told Roberts, "I checked. The store has been held up a half a dozen times in the past two years. A punk tried it last week, but ran when a customer entered. A few months ago Swenson was badly beaten by two thugs we later collared. It was after that he took out the pistol permit."

A series of flashes made everybody jump as the photographer snapped pictures of the corpse, of the gun on the counter—a white enamel board bridging the space between the cash register and a frozen food counter. A number of loosely stacked boxes of detergent were under the white counter board.

Another detective had picked up the gun, via a pencil through the trigger guard, put it in a large envelope. Pancini said, "Okay, Swenson, take the money from the register. I'll have a radio car drive you home."

"I live around the corner. I should put the garbage out, the lights—but it doesn't matter. I'll never come back to this store again."

"Leave your keys. We'll lock

up," Pancini told him. "Bring 'em to your house later."

The grocer nodded, finally opened his eyes, watery with tears. He put on an old sweater hanging from the side of the refrigerator of beer, soda and milk, behind him. Roberts and Pancini stepped outside into the cool night air.

Pancini said, "Looks like one of those open-and-shut deals: the pliers in the dead man's hands. Let's go to my squad room, start the paper work rolling."

Roberts said, "I'll be along. I want to talk to Mrs. Ortiz."

"You speak Spanish?"

"No. Maybe I'll call downtown for an interpreter."

"What can she tell you?" Pancini asked.

"I don't know. Maybe about the death of a good man," Roberts said.

They watched Mr. Swenson leaving, a patrolman walking him around the corner to an old apartment house. The crowd began to melt away, talking in whispers.

Roberts strolled down the block, crossed the wide street and stared up at a large elevator apartment house, about twenty years old, but well kept. He walked through a dim side alley and into a clean basement, garbage cans covered and neatly stacked against one whitewashed wall. At a door marked *Superintendent* he pressed a doorbell, the ringing loud in the stillness. After a long moment Roberts pushed the door open and

stepped into a startling modern and very bright kitchen.

A pretty young girl in a red robe sat at the kitchen table.

Showing his shield, Roberts asked where Mrs. Ortiz was. The girl answered in fast Spanish, then fell back into her daze, moaning and rocking slightly on the chair. Roberts stepped into a living room spotless and neat with fairly new and cheap furniture.

The T.V. was on. Turning it off, he looked into a darkened room, made out two dark-haired youngsters about three and five sleeping in twin beds. He switched on the light in another bedroom, stared briefly at the pictures of saints on the walls, the large bed with a blue cover, the dresser, mirror, chairs. The kind of stuff you bought on credit.

Walking quietly back into the kitchen, Roberts stared at the young girl sobbing aid mumbling in Spanish, long black hair reaching the compact hips. He went out softly. In the lobby of the house Roberts studied the names next to the polished bells. Then he stood on the sidewalk. A far older and shabby house stood farther down the street, on the verge of becoming a tenement.

Roberts went into this house, the front door unlocked, lit a match to read the few names scratched next to what had once been bells. He stepped into a hallway smelling of stale foods and lit another match

before the names on the nest of dirty mailboxes.

Escobar was on the third floor front. When Roberts knocked, a teenage boy in dungarees and torn gray sweatshirt opened the door, asked, "Yeah? What you selling, mister?"

Behind the boy Roberts saw a small kitchen, school books open on the white table. From another part of the narrow apartment he heard a TV sheriff ordering somebody to be out of town by sundown. When Roberts flashed his badge the boy's face turned a sickly tan. "Police? Look, I ain't done a thing. I—"

"Do you speak Spanish, boy?" Roberts asked softly.

The teenager hesitated, then nodded. From another room a man called out something in Spanish and a second later a fat little man in old slippers and a worn T-shirt sticking out of old pants, came rushing into the kitchen, yelling, "Police? I got a good boy. What—" Turning to his son, he rattled off nervous Spanish.

The boy said, "No, Pa, I haven't been in any trouble or—"

"There's no trouble," Roberts broke in. "I need a translator. Do you know Manuel Ortiz?"

The boy glanced uneasily at his father; then he shrugged and said, "We heard he was killed. When something like that happens, we don't even go near the scene. Look, man, I been right here, doing my

school work. I don't know nothing about—"

"What's your name?"

"Eddie Escobar. But I been home all the—"

"Eddie, all I want you to do is come with me to Mrs. Ortiz's, translate for me."

"Yeah? She speaks pretty good English," Eddie said suspiciously.

"Right now she's upset, just talks Spanish, I'm told. I want to ask a few routine questions. It won't take long."

Eddie glanced at his father again. Roberts added, "Maybe she needs some one of her own, to talk to."

Eddie reached for a windbreaker as his father hurriedly mumbled something in Spanish, telling him to stay home.

The boy shrugged and left with Roberts. As they crossed the street, Roberts asked, "Did you know Manuel, Eddie?"

"A little, like sometimes I'd say hello. You know, not many Puerto Ricans around here. Naw, I really didn't know him. He was one of these squares fresh up from the island, an eager-beaver. He had that super job and afternoons he worked elsewhere. Carpenter, I think. A real hick, always smiling like he'd found heaven in his crummy jobs up here."

"Did he drink?"

"Mister, I only saw him now and then, like he's sweeping the sidewalk. I never seen him with a bot-

tle. I don't know anything about him."

When they entered the kitchen, the young woman was still staring at the table. Roberts told Eddie, "Ask the daughter where Mrs. Ortiz is?"

Eddie grinned. "Man, this is his wife, not his daughter." Then he asked her something in Spanish and the woman seemed to snap out of her daze long enough to let go a burst of Spanish before weeping hysterically.

"What did she say?" Roberts asked.

"That her Manuel was a good man, that he was no robber."

The woman jumped up, a graceful movement, her robe opening slightly to reveal slim, creamy thighs, a sight not lost on either Eddie nor Roberts. She raced out of the kitchen, returning seconds later to toss a bank book and some papers on the table as she rattled on in Spanish.

Opening the bank book Roberts saw a joint savings account with weekly deposits of \$15 and \$20, amounting to \$862.56. The papers showed that all the furniture and T.V. had been paid for, the final installment stamped about three months ago.

Mrs. Ortiz was yelling Spanish at Roberts, her dark, angry eyes glaring at him. Eddie held up his hands, telling her to be still, then he told Roberts, "She says it's not possible her Manuel held up the store. He

lives here rent-free, plus gas and electric and gets a hundred and sixty dollars a month. In the afternoons he worked in a cabinet shop, usually made about sixty dollars a week from that. They don't need money, why should he hold up his friend, Pete Swenson?"

"Ask her how friendly they were."

"She already told me that. Manuel used to go to the store every day, for milk and bread. Meats and big stuff he got from the supermarket."

"Did he owe Swenson money?"

Eddie asked Mrs. Ortiz, then grinned. "She says he used to run up a small bill, like fifteen or twenty bucks a month because Swenson would cash his pay checks. She says Manuel was even doing some carpenter work for the grocer last week. That's how friendly they were."

"What kind of work? Did they argue over payment?"

Eddie translated this, looked puzzled, then shrugged as he told the Homicide man, "She doesn't know. Just a board with some hooks on it. A simple thing but complicated, Manuel sweated over it because the measurements had to be just so. He brought it to the store a couple days ago. No argument about pay; the old man took five dollars off Manuel's tab."

"A board with hooks?"

Eddie nodded. "She says Swenson wanted it badly, but she does-

n't know what it was—just wood and a couple hooks."

Roberts thought for a moment. "Ask if Manuel drank, had a bad temper."

When the boy asked this, the woman's eyes grew larger with anger as she shouted at Roberts, then sat at the table again, sobbing. Eddie said, "She says he never drank, not even beer, that he was a good man and kind, thinking only of his family, an angel. Maybe he really is an angel now, huh?"

"Has she any family up here?"

A few seconds later Eddie told the detective, "She's two cousins on the east side. She's been too upset to phone 'em."

"Get the numbers. You call them, ask them to come over and stay with her. Does she have a phone?"

Eddie asked Mrs. Ortiz, then told Roberts, "There's a phone in the living room. I'll call."

Roberts stood in the kitchen, playing with his hat, staring down at the pretty young woman, wishing she'd stop weeping.

Eddie returned. "They both taking cabs here. You got any more questions? My science teacher is one of these homework-happy clowns."

"Tell Mrs. Ortiz I said thanks for talking to us, to me."

When they were outside, Roberts shook Eddie's hand, thanked him. Eddie grinned. "Man, you're the first fuzz I ever shook hands

with. Well, I got to split. Rough for her in there. She has two kids."

"I know."

Eddie raced home as Roberts went from apartment house to apartment house, ringing the bells. He found two Cohens. The first Mrs. Cohen said she never shopped in Swenson's. "He's too high. Not that I blame him, he can't compete with the supermarkets. But we live on a strict budget."



The other Mrs. Cohen was a talkative old woman who kept saying, over and over, how terrible it was. Roberts finally was able to ask, "When you left the store, did Swenson seem nervous, upset?"

"No. Of course around that time of evening he's always tired. I know. My husband and I used to have a store, candy and cigarettes. Be your own boss! That's nonsense! You slave for your bills and—"

"In other words, Mr. Swenson seemed the same as always, Mrs. Cohen?"

"Sure. When I returned a couple minutes later, I saw him and that man, the Puerto Rican, laughing and—"

"When did you return?"

"I needed a hand of garlic, for a

stew. When I reached the lobby here, I looked in my bag and didn't see it. At my age, you don't remember so well. I started back to the shop. Then, as I neared the place, I remembered I'd put it in my coat pocket. But I saw them both laughing. How could he laugh one minute and hold up poor Mr. Swenson the next?"

"You saw the actual job?"

"I did not. When I found the garlic, I went home. It takes time for stew to cook. You smell it?"

"What time did you see them laughing?"

"Who keeps time on such a thing? Some time after eight."

Roberts walked to the store. Two uniformed officers were standing inside, smoking. The corpse had been removed. For a long time Roberts stood there, studying the small store, the chalked outline of the body. He examined a top shelf where some syrup bottles were hanging from hooks screwed into the shelf above.

He walked back of the counter, saw a large cardboard box full of papers, empty cans and nonreturnable bottles and other garbage. All this was covered with the white powder of a detergent, part of the opened box showing.

Roberts asked the patrolmen, "Either of you know anything about the grocery business?"

"Only that it keeps me broke," the younger cop said.

"If a box of soap was busted,

could the owner return it for a credit?" Roberts asked.

The other officer said, "Maybe. If a soda or beer bottle breaks, he can return the neck for a new bottle. I once dropped a quart of beer and my grocer told me that."

Taking off his coat, Roberts dug deeper into the garbage, soon found the torn remains of the rest of the detergent box. Putting them together, he saw powder burns.

Pushing the stacked boxes aside under the counter, Roberts felt of the narrow piece of wood screwed into the underside of the counter, the three, uneven hooks hanging downward from the wood. He told the two officers, "Look through everything in the store, see if you find a wire about two or three feet long."

"Wire? What kind of a wire?"

"Any kind!" Roberts snapped.

Ten minutes later one of the cops found it behind cans of beer in the refrigerator. A long copper wire about one quarter inch in diameter, one end forming a tiny hook, at the other end a larger hook at a different angle. Roberts told one of the cops to come with him, then told the other, "Call Pancini. Tell him I'm arresting Swenson."

"Arresting the old man? What for, sir?"

"Manslaughter, at least. Maybe homicide. Let the D.A. decide," Roberts said, leaving the store.

An old woman answered their ring. Opening the door she said,

"Please, can't you leave him alone? Pete's very upset and—"

Swenson appeared behind his wife, wearing the same pants and shirt he'd had on in the store. Running his eyes down the worn pants, Roberts pointed his right hand at a small rip above the knee, asked, "When did you tear your pants, Mr. Swenson?"

"My pants?" Swenson repeated, glancing down at the rip. "I don't know. You brush up against a wooden milk crate or a—"

"Stop it," Roberts broke in. He held up the long wire. "Whose cute idea was this?"

"Why I—" Swenson wet his lips, seemed to shrink a little, the waxen face became unglued. "Mine!" The word was a hoarse moan. "I was held up last week and never had a chance to get my gun. The thug ran out when a customer came in, but— All right, I'll confess, I couldn't keep this horror in me anyway. It was all an accident!"

"I know," Roberts said.

"My God, Manuel is—was—a good man. A fine man, the best! I—I asked if he could rig up a thing where my gun would be hanging under the counter, behind the detergent boxes. We both figured out where a stickup man would stand, near the register. The gun hung there and the wire to the trigger came out the back of the counter.

"We figured all I'd have to do was to pull the wire, or, even push

it to one side with my leg. Now, it may sound like a horrible thing to do, but I'm an old defenceless man and terrified of being beaten up again!"

"And tonight? Did you tell Manuel the wire was out too far? Was he trying to shorten it with his pliers?"

Swenson closed his eyes as he nodded. "Yes! Oh my God, yes! I told him to disconnect the wire first, but he said it wasn't necessary; he'd hold on to the wire as he bent it just a little. There was Manuel, about to reach over the counter and I moved out of his way and then—like in a nightmare I felt my pants catch and I heard the shot! God forgive me for lying, but what else could I do? Nothing would bring Manuel back to life.

"I found myself tearing up the detergent box with the powder burns on it. I hid the wire and phoned the police that I'd been held-up. I swear I didn't mean to smear Manuel's good name, but I didn't know what I was doing. Officer, do you understand that it was all a horrible accident? Manuel was a good man, my friend. I'd never harm him!"

"But you did and a good man is dead. You'll have to come with us, Mr. Swenson," Roberts said softly.

From behind Swenson, and the door, Roberts heard Mrs. Swenson burst into a shrill wail of horror. She sounded exactly like Mrs. Ortiz.

Never Hit Old Ladies!

by GORDON R. PRESCOTT

A little old lady, a great big diamond—it had to add up to trouble.



BELLE SHAKER wasn't quite the high-button shoes grandmother type, but Bud's Café on Dock Street wasn't quite a tea house either, especially on a Saturday

night. More than one shaggy eyebrow soared as she marched primly through the swinging doors and perched as prettily as you please on a bar stool, even though there wasn't any particular rule against it.

When the shock wore off a little, Mike, the ex-wrestler bartender, approached her with distrusting caution.

"A small glass of sherry, please, young man," Belle said, in a silvery voice more suited to a parlor filled with tintypes.

Like everyone else in Bud's, Jakey Poole, at a nearby table, watched the Whistler's Mother type old lady with more than casual interest.

It wasn't the fair-sized roll of bills she peeled a twenty from that made his eyes bulge, though the money certainly didn't go unnoticed. Rather, when she lifted her glass, little finger extended delicately, Jakey nearly forgot to swallow an ample sized mouthful of beer when, on the ring finger of her right hand, there flashed a diamond solitaire bigger than any he ever knew existed.

"Sammy," he spluttered across the table, his face reddish purple from the brew that had trickled down his windpipe, "my God, look! Must be a—a million carats!"

Sammy twisted a bloodshot, hungover eye painfully toward the bar.

"More like about three," he

whispered, because loud noises made his head throb. His brow drooped back over a nearly empty glass, as though the fumes would help clear his foggy head.

Jakey's eyes took on a faraway look.

"Must be worth at least three grand. What we couldn't do—"

"Which means Louie might give you three C's for it," Sammy commented.

Jakey's face took on a pained expression, aimed at the in-born dishonesty of pawnbrokers.

Other faces still stared at the high-necked ankle-length black dress, the rose among the thorn-like dirty T-shirts and grimy dungarees.

A reverent sort of hush blanketed the Café, and several dozen pairs of eyes followed the slow, graceful rise and fall of the blue-white stone, while several dozen beers warmed themselves unattended, clutched in their owners' varyingly moist palms.

Jakey was too well aware of the situation.

"Sammy," he pleaded, "if we don't, one of these other goons will. And they might *hurt* her!"

He was quite overcome. The painful vision of an ungentle thug wielding an unfeeling length of lead pipe too hard on that delicate skull—

"Uh-huh," Sammy grunted, cradling his head in his hands. The booze habits of rich, eccentric old

ladies interested him not in the least.

Finishing her sherry with one last delicate sip, Belle inclined her head a fraction of an inch toward the watching bartender.

"I think I will have just one more, please, young man," she said in a near whisper, as though it were a confession. She rummaged through the pile of bills and change in front of her. "Thirty-five cents, was it?"

"Look," Mike grunted, leaning across the bar, "it's your money and all that, but don't you think you'd better stash it in your pocket book?"

Belle's eyes grew wide behind steel-rimmed spectacles.

"You don't mean," she whispered in a shocked tone, "that any of these nice young men are—dishonest?"

Mike tried not to choke. Jakey, overhearing her, was slightly less fortunate.

"Of course not," Mike replied unctuously, his eyes raised ceiling-ward. And he turned quickly away to wipe at an invisible spot at the far end of the bar.

Belle scooped most of the bills into her purse, but the diamond still flashed and was still hungrily watched by more than one pair of greedy eyes.

"I tell you, Sammy," Jakey resumed, "it'd be for her own good. Look—so she likes her wine in a bar, instead of at home, where she

should oughta do her drinkin'. So that's no crime, is it?"

Sammy looked up once briefly, to indicate he'd heard.

"Flashin' a rock like that—she could get herself killed! I tell you, something oughta be done. It's almost our civic duty!" Tiny beads of sweat broke out on his balding head.

Sammy shook his head. "Unh-unh. Drunks I roll, yeah, but not little old ladies." He pushed back his chair and rose slowly, cradling his still aching head with one hand. "I gotta meet a guy. And Jakey—do me a favor? Forget about the old lady."

"Yeah, sure, Sammy. See yuh, huh?" he muttered, his nervous eyes still on the diamond.

Sammy shrugged and left.

Jakey finished the last of his beer and downed two more in quick succession. The sweat on his palms increased, and his upper lip began an irritating twitch. When he couldn't stand watching her and thinking about it any more, he rose abruptly and left.

It was cool in the night air, and he breathed deeply to help clear his mind of its confusion of thoughts. He glanced quickly around—Dock Street was almost deserted. He crossed quickly to the other side and stared into the lighted window of a second-hand-furniture store, his mind made up.

Ten minutes passed before her black reflection appeared in the

plate glass window. It had seemed more like two hours. She turned left, clutching her black hand bag close, and strode briskly down the empty sidewalk.

Jakey waited a few seconds, but no one followed her out of the bar, and no one was in sight. He walked along on the other side of the street, fifty feet or so behind.

Jakey had no plan—yet. One thing—he was sure she hadn't seen him. Resigning himself to the inevitable, he knew he'd just have to wait for the right time, the right place.

At the next intersection his heart stopped. She'd turned the corner, and before he could cross the street, a crawling switch engine pulling a string of cars grunted between them. He darted around the front of the thumping Diesel, ignoring the curses of the brakeman, and ran to the corner. Then he saw her, halfway down the block, and he breathed again.

Then—it was like having a guardian angel! He could almost thank her, because she'd turned into an alley. Probably where she lived, he thought. He quickened his steps and came up behind her. She turned, her eyes wide.

"Don't be scared, lady," he said, as gently as he knew how, watching her face lit by the gloom of a distant street light, just hoping she wouldn't scream.

"What do you want, young man? You—you'd better go away," her voice quivered. She backed a little way from him.

"I'm not going to hurt you—honest. Just give me the ring and the money, that's all." He stepped closer to her.

"I'll do no such thing!" She clutched her hands together close in front of her, embracing her purse.

"Then I guess I'll just have to help myself," and his hand reached out.

It was over in no time at all. Soundless, except for the soft *whump* of flesh meeting flesh, the slow crumbling of a body in sleep, and the bent-over form with hands fumbling.

One shadow detached itself from the other and emerged from the alley, a hand tightly clutched. In the light of a street lamp fingers rifled through bills.

"Ninety-three dollars. Humph! I'd thought sure he had more than that on him!" Belle crammed the bills into her purse. Her hand was still sore from the judo lick she'd landed below his left ear—the darkness must have spoiled her aim a little—and she rubbed it gingerly.

She sighed contentedly and strode off down the sidewalk.

"Now, just where was that bar on Center Street?" she said aloud.

Bier on the Rocks

*The Nazi butchers had gone. But the
death seeds they had sown still lived.
Today a peaceful Greek island remem-
bered—and reaped its deadly harvest.*

by CHARLES VENTURA



AS THE TINY ferry neared the dock at Petris, Frances Bascom Ivy sighted the Cronins. Even at this distance, Frances could see that they both looked haggard and worried.

She looked around her at the quaintly garbed passengers and the assorted livestock the Greek villagers had brought with them on the shabby old gasoline launch, before turning back to scan her friends and the old-world backdrop of ancient stone buildings along the waterfront.

The contrast between the dreamy, peaceful scene and the news that had brought her from bustling Athens struck her forcibly.

It seemed incredible that one of Bruce Cronin's assistants had been brutally murdered in this pastoral setting. She shuddered at his telephoned description of the body a shepherd had discovered, high on the mountain that loomed above the village. There had been a tremor in his voice as he described the gruesome find.

"The killer must have been a

lunatic with a grisly sense of humor," he'd said. "Kevin Allen's body was placed head down on a makeshift catafalque of rocks that resembled a rocket-launching platform."

F. B. Ivy had been aware of Bruce Cronin's mission on the shores of the Gulf of Corinth, before his S.O.S. call to her Athens hotel. As one of a carefully screened group of secret operatives, Frances was in Greece to investigate and evaluate the forces behind the country's recent political upheaval.

Even before she had left Washington on the Greek assignment, Frances had learned that young Cronin and two assistant technicians were utilizing the incredibly clear visibility in the Gulf area to study and chart the flight of man-made satellites. With the iron-curtain countries of Bulgaria, Albania and Yugoslavia fringing the nearby borders, the project rated high as a classified operation.

While the tiny ferry was being jockeyed within rope-tossing range, a tall, fair-haired man leaped across the intervening distance onto the deck.

He reached for the redhead's overnight bag with a shy smile.

"I am Adolph Gruber," he said. "My wife and I do the housework and gardening for Mr. and Mrs. Cronin."

He steadied her arm with a strong hand as she stepped from

the launch to the dock. A moment later, Frances was enveloped in a bear hug. Lisa Cronin's eyes were moist as she greeted her longtime friend and former schoolmate. Bruce gave the redhead a peck on the cheek and a hearty handshake.

The three chatted in the rambling fashion of reunited friends as they picked their way through the group of villagers on the dock and strolled down the waterfront, with Adolf and the suitcase bringing up the rear. Nothing was said of the tragedy that had brought F. B. Ivy to Petris until she had enjoyed a warm shower and was sipping a cool drink on the seaside terrace of the Cronins' villa.

Bruce sat down heavily on a neighboring deck chair. "I'm worried about Jimmy Young, my other assistant," he said. "I asked him to be sure and stick around the house until we came back from the ferry with you. Hilda just told me that she saw him walk out of our back gate with one of the village girls. That's not like Jimmy."

Lisa laughed. "Not like Jimmy? I'd say it was characteristic. Most of the village beauties pursue the handsome devil and he certainly meets them halfway. Before Kevin's death you wouldn't have given the incident a second thought." She broke off abruptly. "There goes our Hilda now for her regular communion with nature."

The trio watched the swimmer knife through the calm waters to-

ward a small, rocky island, about a quarter of a mile offshore.

Lisa explained idly, "Hilda takes a swim and a sun bath in the nude every day at the same time, providing the sun is shining, of course. All of our male star-gazers have been warned to stay away from the other side of that island between one and three each afternoon."

Bruce grinned sheepishly. "The warning came a little late for me," he said.

Lisa winked at their house guest. "This peeping Tom caught Hilda with her bikini down."

Bruce gazed after the swimmer. "Thank goodness Hilda is not the easily outraged type or we might be doing our own cooking and housework. When I swam up and found her stretched out naked on a flat rock I was so flabbergasted that I swallowed a pint of seawater before I could close my mouth."

He chuckled. "She raised herself on one elbow and said, 'I'm afraid I have embarrassed you, Mr. Cronin. I should have told Mrs. Cronin that I sunbathe here like this.'

Bruce sighed. "I wish I hadn't been so busy trying to look nonchalant. I didn't get a good look before I swam away. What I saw was provocative."

The smile left his face as he turned to leave the room. "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to excuse me. I'm snowed under. Please let me know the moment Jimmy shows up. I'd like him to be here

when we review the events leading up to Kevin's death."

The girls watched him disappear into the house.

Frances said, "From Bruce's glowing description I gather that Hilda is considerably younger than her husband. Adolf is obviously in the middle-age bracket."

Lisa nodded. "Hilda is in her twenties. Adolf is old enough to have served in the German army during World War Two. They met and married in Austria after he deserted from the army. We found them working in an old castle in Austria that had been transformed into a tourist hotel, and brought them here. Adolf was stationed in this very village during the Nazi occupation. Some of the tales he tells about Nazi atrocities in this area are enough to make your blood run cold."

Her face clouded. "Here I sit, prattling about our cook, when Jimmy Young may be in danger."

F. B. Ivy stirred restlessly. "Perhaps worry is contagious. Why don't we get Mr. Gruber to help us look for Jimmy? He can't have gone very far. Didn't I understand you to say that the only methods of locomotion in the village are shank's mare and riding a donkey?"

Lisa's eyes were grateful. "I was hoping you would suggest that. I sent Adolf out to do some shopping, so I'll have to saddle a brace of balky beasts. I've done it lots of times. We'll cruise through the vil-

lage and try to locate Adolf first. He may have run across Jimmy, since he left the house. Let's change into slacks first. Nothing scratches worse than donkey fuzz on bare legs."

Lisa displayed a surprising proficiency in saddling the tiny animals. They were off and trotting. Frances felt like a tipsy giant as she swayed on the squat mount, but soon became accustomed to the erratic motion.

After they had dismounted several times and peered into a number of picturesque little stores, Frances suggested they give up the search for the handyman and concentrate on the missing technician. Lisa thought the coffeehouse might be a good bet. They exhausted this possibility via the village's three cafes in less than fifteen minutes.

F. B. Ivy reined in her stubby mount as they were leaving the last of the tiny smoke-filled pubs.

"You'd better return to the house," she advised her friend. "I'll try to pry one of the coffeehouse loafers away from his dice-throwing long enough to guide me up the mountain to where Kevin was found."

She smiled at Lisa's expression. "Don't worry, honey. I can take care of myself. If anyone gets hurt in the mountains you can be sure it won't be me."

A deadly looking automatic appeared in F. B. Ivy's hand as if by magic.

Lisa gasped. "I see what you mean," she said.

II

FRANCIS IVY felt she had made a wise choice, as she jogged along the steep, treacherous mountain trail behind her recently acquired guide and his sure-footed donkey. The man ahead was a gnarled olderster, garbed in the colorful garments of the Greek shepherd. His skin had been burned to a deep leather color from the Hellenic suns.

There had been a moment of surprised silence when Frances walked in and addressed the coffeehouse's sole waiter in fluent Greek. A chorus of strident voices answered her request for a guide. The gray-haired shepherd, seated at the rear of the smoke-filled room, had caught her attention because of his picturesque garb.

As their eyes met, the shepherd smiled slightly. His smile widened when Frances pushed past the volatile and bold-eyed young men who stood in her path and walked directly to his table.

They had been jogging along in silence for some time when her guide turned in the saddle.

"This is one of the most beautiful views from the mountain," he said, as they rounded a rocky crag.

Frances gazed through the break in the towering rock canyon and saw a mosaic of tiled roofs set

against a cobalt blue sea. She smiled her appreciation. A moment later they were again hemmed in by towering stone crags.

The shepherd called back. His face was somber.

"It was my cousin, Panayotis Turla, who found the American's body," he said. "He was bringing his sheep down from higher in the mountains when he saw the buzzards circling around a small plot of grass with a strange-looking mound of stones in its center. The place is very close to here."

They had come to another break in the canyon walls. She saw the tiny patch of green he had described. As they neared the small oasis of color, she saw the oddly tilted mound in the center of the sparse grass that had been Kevin Allen's bier on the rocks.

The figure ahead of her suddenly cried out something unintelligible and kicked his donkey's sides. Frances watched the man and donkey for a moment, then urged her own mount into action. The shepherd had dismounted and was bending over the rocks when she pulled up.

Both of them gazed in horror at the figure of a man lying head-downward on the rock-shaped mound. It took only a quick look to make Frances realize that the man whose slashed throat was a mass of coagulated blood couldn't possibly be Bruce's missing assistant.

The corpse, clad in clothes identical to her shepherd guide's, was elderly and dark-visaged. Frances Ivy's experienced eye noted that the man had been dead for several hours.

Her guide's face was wooden with repressed emotion. "It is my cousin, Panayotis." He sighed and shook his head. "Like most Greeks, Panayotis talked too much. He must have told the wrong person the story he told me."

The redhead, who was examining the body, extracted a torn piece of paper and a bit of dark cloth from a dangling hand and scanned them both carefully before placing them in a pocket of her slacks. The shepherd looked at her curiously.

"I feel that I can trust you," she said. "I am a special investigator from the United States. I am hoping you will help me solve both your cousin's murder and that of the American. Perhaps you will start by telling me what your cousin said to you."

He showed his scraggly teeth in a sad smile. "I knew you were somebody special when you spoke your first words in the coffeehouse."

Averting his eyes from the maimed throat, he tenderly closed the staring eyes. Removing the white woolen shawl from his shoulders, he covered the top part of the body and turned back to Frances.

"After my cousin came upon the body of the American, he left the sheep with his dog and started

down the mountain to notify the police in the village. When he came to the break in the canyon where we stopped to look at the sea, he heard the distant bray of a donkey. He looked down and saw two men riding the trail far down the mountainside. It was quite far, but he said he could tell by the way they rode their donkeys that they were foreigners.

"As you know, this is not the tourist season, so there are very few foreigners hereabouts. Outside of the Russian crews that load bauxite into the ships near the village and your American friends, there are no foreigners here."

Frances raised her eyebrows. "Russian crews? Bauxite? Please tell me more. Why would they have Russians loading bauxite into ships?"

He made a contemptuous gesture. "The Greek owners of bauxite mines in this area sell all of their ore to the Russians. The Russians will not allow anyone aboard their ships, so the crews do the loading. There are always sailors on shore leave who go sightseeing in the mountains. Another cousin of mine, who works in the mines, says that Russian engineers often stay in a house near the loading platforms, provided by the mine owners, between the visits of the ships."

Frances Ivy nodded thoughtfully. "It's getting late," she said. "We had better tell the police about your cousin's death."

When they reached the outskirts of the village the shepherd reined in his diminutive mount and waited for Frances.

"You may rest assured," he said, as she came along-side, "I will not betray your confidence. I think it would be well if I visit the police alone. They will ask many questions and I know you are anxious to return to the house of your friends. I will be at the coffeeshop tomorrow, if you want me."

The redhead handed him the two-hundred drachma fee upon which they had agreed.

"I have a better idea. Come to my friends' villa at seven tomorrow morning. You can tell your friends that I have engaged you as a guide for the duration of my stay in Petris. I have a feeling I will need your services in more ways than one."

They rode to the waterfront together, where the old man lifted his woolen cap and pointed to the Cronins' villa in the distance.

Frances said, "Ask for Miss Frances Ivy when you come to the house."

"I feel as though we had known each other for a long time," he said, "and we are only now exchanging names. My name is Janus Scalesteri."

She leaned over and offered her hand. "We have an appointment at seven."

As she prodded her tiny mount into action she saw three figures

emerge from the Cronins' waterfront villa. Bruce and Lisa were easily recognizable. It was not until she was within a block of the advancing figures that she recognized Adolf Gruber as the third member of the trio.

"Jimmy hasn't shown up," Bruce called. "Did you find out anything?"

Lisa stared with distended eyes as Frances Ivy told of the second gruesome discovery on the mountain. Bruce swore softly. "We've checked every building," he said, "even had the local police helping us search for Jimmy. The chief speaks English fairly well. Everyone he questioned swears that Jimmy wasn't seen by anyone in the village today."

Frances dismounted and turned the donkey over to Adolf. She addressed the handyman. "Did your wife describe the woman she saw with Mr. Young at the back gate?"

He shook his head. "Hilda says all of the village girls look alike to her from a distance, especially since they all wear black from head to foot. The only thing she saw clearly was that the girl wore a black shawl over her head."

"What makes Hilda so sure that it was a girl and not an older woman she saw?"

Adolf smiled slightly. "The young ladies in the village are always after Mr. Young."

Bruce said, "Woman or girl, Jimmy was decoyed into leaving



the house. He did not wander away for a romantic tryst. I'd stake my life on that."

Lisa winced and clutched her husband's arm protectively. "I'm afraid that's exactly what you are doing, my love—staking your life."

III

PETRIS'S chief of police awakened Bruce Cronin the following morning at daybreak to inform him that he had deputized men from the village to comb the surrounding mountains for any trace of his assistant and to say that one of his own staff was stationed within sighting distance of the rocky bier that had served as a last resting place for young Allen and the shepherd.

Lisa and Frances joined Bruce in the kitchen after the voluble official departed.

"I'll whip up some eggs and bacon," Lisa said. "Hilda and Adolf put in a long enough day without

awakening them at this ungodly hour."

Frances Ivy waited until they had downed their first cup of coffee before handing Bruce the small, torn scrap of paper and the dark gray bit of cloth she had extracted from the dead shepherd's hand.

Bruce examined them curiously.

"The writing is Russian," said the redhead. "I'm fairly proficient in that language. The ink is smeared, but two words are legible. They are 'satellite' and 'dangerous'. The cloth is a woolen suit material. The inference, of course, is that the shepherd came to grips with his assailant and tore the cloth and the paper from a pocket of his coat."

Lisa's eyes mirrored her horror "So that's the answer. This satellite tracking station is worrying the Soviets and they've decided to eliminate it and the men who operate it."

Bruce shook his head. "That's pretty far-fetched, honey. Anyhow, I don't believe there are any Russians within miles of this confounded place."

Frances told them of the Russian sailors and engineers her elderly guide had mentioned as being in the bauxite mining area. She scanned her host's countenance. "I know your work is in strictest security and you can't discuss it, Bruce, but have you any reason to believe that the reds might be alarmed enough about your activi-

ties to liquidate you and your men?"

Cronin looked uncomfortable. "Killing us off wouldn't accomplish anything. We would be replaced and the work would go on."

Frances said, "Is it possible that the Russians are planning some sort of satellite maneuver around this area in the near future and could pull it off between the time they eliminated you and your men and the time it would take to bring in a new staff?"

Bruce sighed. "There have been hints that the Soviets are designing a giant satellite capable of dropping manned craft near our missile installations. But the Russians are a long way off from perfecting anything powerful and diversified enough for such a maneuver."

He shrugged. "If they did have that type of satellite, this would be the ideal spot to stage a rehearsal for such an attack, but the chances are a thousand to one against it." He handed her the torn cloth and the smudged piece of paper.

"To be perfectly honest with you, Frances," he said, "it's possible that Kevin and Jimmy might have run afoul of some jealous Greek husband. These hinterlanders are the soul of kindness unless you fool with their women. Every day you see stories in the Athens newspapers about rural Greek husbands killing their wives' boyfriends. I warned, both of the youngsters, but I'm afraid they've been diddling most of the pretty

girls in the village, married and unmarried."

"Oh sure," Lisa said. "And I suppose the jealous Greek husband built a rock bier in the shape of a rocket platform and had a note in his pocket with the Russian word for 'satellite' written on it."

A knock on the kitchen window interrupted her. Frances's guide of the day before stood outside the window. She beckoned to the man outside the window.

"Let him in the back gate, Bruce. I'm sure he'd like a cup of coffee."

A few moments later, the dignified old gentleman was smiling at them over a steaming cup of Turkish coffee. Bruce and Lisa were immediately captivated by the shepherd's courtly manners. His excellent command of English proved an agreeable surprise. He explained modestly that he had put several years of military service with the British Armed Services.

As the old fellow munched on Hilda's spice cookies, Frances plied him with questions.

"I am quite curious about one phase of village life," she said. "The manager of the bank in Itea told me that it was impossible to persuade the people in this province to deposit money in his bank. According to him, less than five percent of the residents of Petris have bank accounts. He says they all bury gold in their houses. Is that true?"

The shepherd's eyes narrowed. "It is true. Most of the Greeks in

the rural districts feel the same way about putting their money in banks. We have had many wars in Greece and each time there is a war, the currency has become worthless, while gold has increased in value."

Lisa said, "I should think the villagers would be afraid to leave their houses for fear someone would steal their gold."

"No one in Petris would dream of stealing gold from a neighbor," the shepherd said. "Even if they did, they would be caught. This is a small village and no one can make a move without being observed. Anyhow, there is not enough gold in the entire village to make theft worthwhile."

Janus Scalesteri sighed as he put down his cup. "This was not so before the German occupation. Petris was Greece's leading seaport and shipbuilding center during the days of sailing vessels. Many of our residents were rich by Greek standards."

The old shepherd cast a shrewd glance at Frances Ivy. "Your banker friend probably told you what happened to our gold during World War Two. The Nazis dropped soldiers in parachutes and took our village so quickly that no one had a chance to hide our gold in the mountains as we and our ancestors have done for centuries. Between the gold that was brought here from Athens by relatives for safekeeping during the early stages

of the German invasion and the gold inherited by descendants of sea captains and shipbuilders, there must have been over a million dollars in coins confiscated by the Nazis."

Scalesteri shrugged. "The gold did not help the German army. The confiscated coins were placed in a chest and deposited in the village's sole warehouse with a half dozen soldiers guarding it. Next morning, the gold and the guards had disappeared. The bodies of the guards were never found, but the commandant felt sure they had been murdered. He threatened to kill one male villager a day until the gold was returned. Fortunately, the officer in charge was transferred to another post and the executions stopped after the third day."

Lisa looked at him wide-eyed. "What happened to the gold? Does anyone know?"

The old man nodded. "I can only guess. Guerillas were in and out of the village all the time. Many of them hid in the homes of relatives when they were not in the mountains. They often cut the throats of Nazi soldiers on dark nights. The Germans had no way of identifying them. Obviously none of the villagers would turn them in. A band of guerillas could have exterminated the guards and stolen the gold. If they did so, none of the money ever found its way back to Petris. We are all equally poor."

He was lost in thought for a few moments. "I think that the theft and the murders of the Nazi guards might have been done by Italian soldiers. Many of the murders of German soldiers in Greece were blamed on guerillas, when they were actually done by gangsters among the Italian occupation forces."

Frances said, "You said that the villagers watch every move made by their neighbors and by strangers. Why is it that no one in the village has seen Mr. Young and the girl he was with when he left this house?"

Scalesteri's eyes were steady as they met hers. "Mr. Young may have left here with a girl, but it definitely was not a girl from this village. I have ways of finding out." He paused and looked at the redhead uncertainly. "I don't wish to give offense, but every man in this village, including myself, knows which girls have been friendly with both Mr. Young and Mr. Allen. Please take my word for it. None of these young women were with Mr. Young yesterday."

"Could either of them have been harmed by jealous boy-friends?" Frances asked.

The old shepherd smiled sardonically.

"Please do not think me indecent, but most of the village youth and a number of men who came to Petris for amusement shared all of the young Americans'

local girl-friends. They are not the type to arouse jealousy."

The front doorbell rang insistently.

Bruce rose from the table. Before he could leave the room they heard Hilda's voice and a masculine murmur. A few moments later, she appeared at the kitchen door.

"There are two men at the door. They say they are from the bauxite mines across the bay and wish to speak to Mr. Cronin."

Bruce turned to the redhead with raised eyebrows. "Odd coincidence. We've never had any visitors before except the local dignitaries and the tradespeople. I'd like to have you with me when I speak to them. Will you show them into the living room, Hilda?"

The two men were standing as Frances and Bruce entered. The taller of the two, a burly giant with a thatch of stubby blond hair, was the first to speak.

"My name is Stefani Gregor. This is Josef Bolsich. We are engineers from the Parnassis bauxite mine. We decided to call on you when we heard of the death of one of your associates and the disappearance of another. One of our associates also has been mysteriously missing for the past four days. We have checked with everyone, including his wife in Itea. No one has seen him since he came to Petris on the ferryboat."

He paused and exchanged



glances with his companion. "Two boys, who work on the ferryboat, told us they saw Costa get off the boat and walk down the waterfront toward this house."

Bruce lowered the hand he had extended toward the speaker. "What do you mean, he was walking toward this house? There are a half-dozen stores and twenty houses between the ferryslip and this house. And who is Costa?"

The big man's face froze into immobility. "Costa Scarimbas is the name of the missing engineer. There is no reason to be impolite. The two boys who saw him last said he was walking toward this house. I was simply repeating their words."

Josef Bolsich broke in. "We did not come here to quarrel with you, Mr. Cronin. I assume from your anger that Costa did come here. Perhaps you will tell us why."

Bruce grinned suddenly. "If you must know, gentlemen, your friend, Mr. Scarimbas, came here to sell me Russian military secrets. I have him chained in the basement. Every thirty minutes or so I go down-stairs and beat him over the head with a rubber hose. So far, he has told me plenty."

The little man's face was suffused with color. "I do not consider your remarks amusing, Mr. Cronin," he said through tightened lips. "Come, Stefani. We will have to use other methods."

Frances, who had been observing the pair in silence, spoke to the larger of the visitors as he started for the door.

"Perhaps you will tell us why your missing associate would want to come to this house. Are you under the impression that Mr. Cronin or any of his house guests are interested in bauxite mining?"

"You choose to jest, young lady," said the big man. "We are fully aware of the nature of Mr. Cronin's activities in Petris."

They left. They did not look back.

IV

FRANCES IVY and the shepherd sat erect on wooden chairs in the

stone hut's single room and nibbled on a sweet between sips of a syrupy brandy. Their hostess looked at them expectantly. The serving of cordial and sweets was in accordance with Greek custom. Mrs. Scarimbas had insisted that the red-headed American girl and Janus Scalesteri partake of both before they explain their visit.

Frances soon came to the point. "We are here to help locate your husband, Mrs. Scarimbas. Also to discover the whereabouts of an American friend. Both were last seen across the bay in the village of Petris. I am hoping you can help us in our search."

Mrs. Scarimbas frowned. "How can I help? Neither I nor any of my family or my friends have seen or heard from Costa since he left the bauxite mines."

Frances Ivy's voice was placating. "Perhaps we can find a clue to your husband's whereabouts by recalling some of his conversations with you. Did Mr. Scarimbas, by any chance, mention who it was that he intended to see in Petris?"

"Costa did not talk to me before he went to Petris. The only time he comes home is on weekends."

"Did your husband ever mention any particular friends or acquaintances in the village of Petris?"

Their hostess flushed. "Costa would not be inclined to mention the kind of friends he and the other miners have in Petris. The girls in

that village have a reputation for being as immoral as they are pretty."

"Did you notice anything unusual about your husband's actions in recent weeks? Did he seem excited or more absent-minded than usual?"

The woman smiled sadly. "Costa is always excited. Life is a glorious adventure to my husband. He still lives in the days when he led a band of guerillas against the Nazis. He also is the world's biggest liar. He even makes up crazy stories about the Russian engineers who live in a separate house at the mines."

Her laughter was a blend of contempt and pity. "One night, Costa pointed toward a bright star in the heavens and said that he was the only Greek in the mines who knew that the Russian engineers were sending messages to this star and receiving answers."

The toil-worn features softened. "My husband lives in a world of his own making. I cannot really hate him. He is a child in a man's body. I hope no harm has come to him."

Mrs. Scarimbas gestured toward the threadbare furnishings in the room. "My poor wild Costa! He told me on his last weekend at home that he was going to take us away from this hovel and move into a mansion in Crete, the island of his birth. I asked him if he hoped to do these grand things on what is left of his earnings at the mine, af-

ter he squanders most of it on women."

Frances asked softly, "What did he answer?"

Mrs. Scarimbas seemed startled at the question. "Now that I think back, his answer was strange. He said he expected to collect a large sum of money. I asked him what he meant and he said for me to forget what he had said or it might prove dangerous for all of us."

The redhead nodded to the shepherd. They rose to take their departure. "We will notify you immediately," she said, "if we learn anything about your husband, Mrs. Scarimbas. Should he contact you, I would appreciate your sending me a message."

Bruce and Lisa had nothing new to report when they met the redhead and the shepherd at the dock in Petris. Frances Ivy relayed the conversation with the missing miner's wife. Bruce's eyes narrowed when she mentioned Costa's remark about the Russians communicating with the star and his warning to his wife.

"They probably killed him when he tried to blackmail them," Bruce said. "That explains Costa's disappearance." He halted in his tracks. "Or does it? If the Russians bumped off Costa, why did they come barging into our place?"

Lisa said, "Probably their devious way of letting you know that they already have disposed of three men who tried to interfere with

their plans and wouldn't hesitate to add you to the list. What worries me is that they may think this Costa character sold you the information before they knocked him off. That would make you a must on their liquidation list."

"That does it," said Bruce. "This place is too dangerous. I want you and Frances to go back to Itea on the ferry's return trip. You can hire a taxi to take you from Itea to Delphi. Check in at the Vouzas Hotel tonight and continue on to Athens in the morning."

He turned to the redhead. "You know whom to contact in Athens. Tell the big brass the whole story and stress the need for speedy reinforcements."

Frances shook her head. "Sorry, Bruce. I'm staying."

As Cronin started to speak, Frances held up a restraining hand. "Give me forty-eight hours. If I don't have this situation under control by that time, I promise I will go to Athens and take Lisa with me."

Frances saw the uncertainty in his eyes. "You know I wouldn't risk Lisa's life, don't you?"

Bruce Cronin's shrug was resigned.

Frances Ivy dug into her purse. She touched the shepherd's arm.

"I need your assistance, my friend. Please take this money. First, you must buy a lantern and make sure it has plenty of oil. Then, rent a rowboat. Try to get a

large, sturdy one. Cushion the oars with cloth so they will move noiselessly in the oarlocks. Meet me at the rocky point below Mr. and Mrs. Cronin's house at eight o'clock tonight and make sure no one sees you close enough to recognize you while you are waiting for me."

Lisa said, "Why rent a boat, Frances? We've got a good seaworthy skiff. The boys use it for fishing."

"Anyone walking along the waterfront would notice it if your boat was missing," said the redhead. "Mr. Scalesteri and I are going to try very hard to keep our mission secret. Thanks just the same, honey."

The three stood for a moment and watched the ramrod-straight old man walk away before Frances broke the silence.

"I'll excuse myself shortly after dinner," she said. "While you two play a hand or two of gin-rummy over an after-dinner brandy and the help are tidying up, I'll slip out of my bedroom window and meet Mr. Scalesteri at the point."

V

BRUCE CRONIN WAS at the breakfast table next morning when Frances Ivy walked in. He whistled as his eyes roamed over the scantily attired figure.

She smiled and placed a finger to her lips. "The less we talk right now, the better. A careless word to

someone outside this house might spoil my plans."

"You can speak freely," Bruce said. "I'm itching to know what happened. First, let me get you some coffee or orange juice or something."

"Coffee is fine, thanks. Pour out another cup, Bruce. I see Mr. Scalesteri coming." She paused. "I can't tell you anything right now, Bruce. I promise, you'll be the first to know when I think it's safe to talk."

"Okay, honey, I'll push off. And let you and your boy friend whisper sweet nothings over your coffee."

Bruce grinned cheerfully as he left the room.

Frances waited until her elderly guest had downed his second cup of coffee before walking to the door and making sure no one was within earshot.

"Please follow the instructions I gave you very carefully, Mr. Scalesteri. Remember one thing in particular. No matter what you see, you and your men are not to come ashore until the police have come and gone with their prisoners. You know what to do, then."

His brow furrowed into leathery lines. "Suppose I see that you are in danger. Surely—"

She interrupted him. "Under no circumstances must you come ashore until the police and their prisoners have left."

His shrug was resigned. "You

can depend on me and my men. They are trusted friends."

She saw him to the front door before stretching out under the sun on the terrace. From her vantage point she could see most of the waterfront.

Lisa joined her a little later, wearing a brief red bikini. Looking out of the window of his workroom, Bruce decided that his brunette wife in red and their redhead guest in blue formed a delightful contrast. A few moments later, he was telling them so as he stretched out beside them on a deck chair.

Lisa winked at Frances. "Okay, peeping Tom. If you're hanging around expecting us to take off as much as Hilda did, you're wasting your time."

Bruce's eyes widened and he glanced at his watch.

"Speaking of our bare bather, is that Hilda I see swimming out to the island? I thought she did her strip act every day at the same time. I distinctly remember your telling me not to go near her private domain between one and three."

"She's getting her sunshine early," his wife said, "I'm sending her over to Itea, this afternoon, for some chickens. I don't want to inflict the local hens on Frances while she's here. They're as tough as shoe leather, probably from scrambling around these rocks looking for enough to eat."

They sat in silence as the swim-

mer rounded the docky tip of the island. Frances looked toward the garden and saw Adolf walking out of the gate with a basket over his arm.

"I see your hired man is doing his marketing early," she said idly.

Lisa followed her gaze. "That's the Germans for you. They're like machines. Adolf is so used to doing the marketing when Hilda takes her daily swim that he automatically dashes for the village when he sees her hit the water."

Frances Ivy shaded her eyes and pointed out to sea.

Bruce followed her gaze. "Hilda is swimming back," he said. "Wonder what happened. Looks like she is in a terrific hurry."

Lisa frowned. "She really is in a hurry. Let's go down to the stone steps and meet her when she comes ashore. Wonder what bugged her."

Bruce helped the Swimmer onto the step. The trio looked at Hilda in surprise. Her eyes were distended and her face was dun-colored under the deep tan as she climbed out of the water.

"What on earth is the matter?" said Lisa. "You look as though you had seen a ghost."

Hilda made an obvious effort to control herself. Her color returned to normal and she made a rueful grimace. "I'm being very silly. It was only an octopus, but it was so large. It seemed about to reach for me."

Frances's eyes were quizzical as

they roamed over the sturdy body. A smile quirked her lips as she thought of the enormous squids that little boys caught with bare hands and tugged out of the sea throughout all Greece. This Amazon looked to be more than a match for any octopus she might encounter in these waters.

Hilda gave them a pallid smile and padded off toward the servants' wing.

Lisa pinched Bruce's arm. "Well, dear, you've learned one thing. You're not as obnoxious as an octopus. Let's get back to our basking, Frances."

"You go back with Bruce, dear," said the redhead. "I'm going to swim out to the island. Don't look so disturbed, honey. I can handle any octopus alive. Anyhow, I've got what it takes to repel any and all dangers in this waterproof bag."

She pointed to the bag she was fastening around her slim waist and dove off the steps before Lisa could reply. The couple on the steps saw her wave just before disappearing around the tip of the island.

VI

THE SEAWARD SIDE of the island was dark and forbidding. The slate-colored stone that rose in tiers from the waterline was honey-combed with countless caves. Frances Ivy pulled herself out of the sea at the only break in the formidable facade and rested on the huge flat

rock that obviously served as Hilda's sun-bathing perch.

After a moment, she picked her way through the jagged rocks toward a flickering light that illuminated the entrance of one of the lower caves. Frances grinned as she noted the eerie glow. She could well understand Hilda's trepidation.

Opening the bag at her waist, she withdrew a pencil-thin steel blade. She inserted the blade into a cloth sheath that had been sewed into the back of her bikini pants and entered the cave.

Once inside the cave, she hid the oilskin bag behind a rock and examined the sand that she and the shepherd had carefully spread on the damp stone floor for any sign of footprints. She saw with satisfaction that no one had entered the grotto since the previous night.

Frances heard the sound of men's voices outside and realized that she had miscalculated the speed of her adversaries' reaction. Two men wearing swim-trunks entered with drawn pistols.

"You can relax, gentlemen. There's no one here except a nosy woman. I just had to find out what caused this flickering light."

The larger of the two men said, "You were very foolish to come back here alone after baiting the trap."

He beckoned to the smaller man. "Go up to the cave and bring enough rope to tie her wrists while I keep her covered."

As they listened to the man's retreating steps the man with the gun said, "I don't want to kill you, but I will, if you make any attempt to escape. You know too much to be turned loose now. If you are sensible, you will not resist. Some one will find you later in the day. You are in no physical danger unless you try foolish heroics."

She looked at the man curiously. "Why did you kill Kevin Allen?"

He heaved a deep sigh. "My associate killed him accidentally. He caught the young man prying and tried to subdue him. Mr. Allen was too powerful. My friend had to stab him in the throat to keep from being throttled."

"And the shepherd?"

He shrugged. "He had to be liquidated. He told his village cronies that he saw us after we placed the body on the rocks."

"And, of course, you took Mr. Allen's body into the mountains to make it look as though he had been killed a great distance from this island. The rocket-shaped bier of stones and the torn paper with the scribbling in Russian was for Mr. Cronin's benefit. How about Jimmy Young?"

"He is hidden away in our cave. You will join him in a few moments. Sorry it had to turn out this way for you, but the stakes are too great to risk turning you loose."

The return of the man with the rope interrupted the discourse. Frances stood quietly while he be-

gan to tie her wrists. The man with the gun said, "This woman is a trained agent. We cannot afford to take chances with her. When we get her to the cave you must tie her ankles together, then latch the two ropes together in back as you did with the American."

Frances stifled a sigh of relief and breathed a prayer of thanksgiving. The pencil-thin cloth scabbard her dressmaker had sewn into her bikini pants was back where nature's curves gave it a natural concealment. She had practiced extracting the razor-sharp blade from the scabbard for hours on end under almost every conceivable handicap. This would be the first time she had been forced to put that practice to a test.

The little man gagged her with a large bandanna, gave a final tug to the knots that encircled the wrists at her back and snickered.

"Why tie her? I don't mind carrying this little beauty. If she is as dangerous as you say, she may give us the slip."

The big fellow made an impatient sound. "This is not time for jokes. You could not climb the treacherous rocks to the cave with her on your back. Come, let us go."

The ascent over the rugged ledges was as tricky as the big man had predicted. Frances Ivy lost her footing several times. The too willing hands of the smaller of her captors helped her avoid some nasty falls. Their destination turned out

to be the tiny entrance of a cave at the topmost tier of rock.

She controlled a desire to turn and look out to sea as the little man motioned for her to get down on her knees and crawl inside. The tall man, who had preceded her, directed the beam of a flashlight into the darkness and she saw just about what she had expected. The cave itself was huge. The rays revealed the bound and gagged figure of a man in swim trunks lying on a straw mat.

A two-way radio set, resting on a bulky looking object, caught her attention.

While the smaller of her captors was binding her ankles and blindfolding her, the large man flipped a switch on the transmitter and uttered a series of numbers in Greek that sounded like code signals. The voice that answered in the same language repeated the numbers.

The man with the rope straightened up with a satisfied grunt. The big fellow said: "This is your department. Tell him that we've had to change our plans. We want the plane ready as soon as possible, instead of tonight as we originally planned. If he sends the launch immediately, we can load up and get out of here before the girl's friends get worried and come after her."

Frances heard the click of the switch as he signed off.

"The launch will be here in about two hours," the little man

said. "Lucas is sending four men to carry our other things down to the boat."

The redhead heard the larger man make an impatient sound. "It seems to me that we are getting too many outsiders involved in our project. One man would have been sufficient. We can assist with the loading."

His companion made soothing noises. "Don't worry. None of the men will know what they are moving. Even Lucas does not know. All he knows is that we have promised him ten thousand dollars in gold when his plane touches down. The men who move us are no problem. We cannot leave this country with our type of luggage, through official channels."

The larger man said, "Very well. Let us carry some of our lighter things down to the water's edge. That will, at least, save time."

Frances Ivy, who had wriggled into a position which she estimated would leave her facing her captors, was using the concealed blade from her bikini. She waited until she heard their voices fade before exerting the final pressure on the frayed ropes.

With her arms freed, it took only a few seconds to rip through her ankle bonds. She hurried to the prostrate form and was glad to note, as she removed the blindfold, that his eyes were open and alert. Before removing the gag she placed a precautionary finger over the man's

lips. The head nodded in understanding.

A few quick slashes and Frances was helping Jimmy Young restore circulation to numbed limbs. She kept her voice down.

"We must get out of here quickly. It would be impossible to reach the sea on this side without being observed. I noticed that we are at the topmost level of the rock



ledges. We will be exposed for only a moment when we step outside. During that moment, you must reach up and pull yourself to the summit, then reach down for me."

Young nodded and they crawled wordlessly through the cave's tiny entrance. A quick look showed the two men still clambering down the rocks. Jimmy found that even his six feet two inches and long arms couldn't quite make the top. He jumped. A moment later Frances was on the summit beside him. They crouched behind the concealing ledge and peered down. Their erstwhile captors were depositing their burdens on the flat rock that served as Hilda's sun-perch.

Frances tugged at Jimmy's arm. The descent seemed interminable

to both, but actually took only a few moments. They slipped into the water and struck out strongly for shore.

VII

AFTER FRANCES contacted the chief, it took less than ten minutes for the village's police force of three, plus a hastily commandeered posse of four hard-eyed fishermen to get under way in a gasoline launch.

The chief was adamant in his refusal to allow any of the Americans to accompany them.

Bruce and Lisa, Jimmy and Frances stood on the stone steps and watched the boat disappear around the island's craggy tip.

Bruce turned to Frances. "Now, will you tell me what the score is? How did you know Jimmy would be stashed away in a cave on the island?"

Jimmy said, "Yes, young lady, and perhaps you can explain why I was conked on the head and trussed up like a turkey in that cave."

Bruce looked at him reprovingly. "I specially asked you to stick around until we got back from the ferry, Jimmy. Served you damned well right."

"Hell's bells, Bruce. All I intended to do was take a quick dip while you were away. While I was splashing around in the sea, in front of the house, I saw someone

swimming toward the island. Thinking it might be Hilda, I decided to have a look."

He grinned sheepishly. "When I got around to the other side there was no sign of Hilda on that flat rock you described. I was about to swim back when I saw someone disappear into a cave, high up on the rocks. Still thinking it was the fair Hilda, I climbed up, poked my head into the cave—and someone knocked me cold."

Bruce stared at him. "But Hilda said she saw you walk out the back gate with one of the village girls."

Jimmy snickered. "Hilda has seen me sneak out the back gate with a dame so often she must have gotten her dates mixed. What I did—" He broke off suddenly at the sound of distant shooting.

They all peered toward the island. The shots continued sporadically. After a period of silence, they saw the police launch rounding the tip of the island and heading toward the steps. As the boat drew nearer, Frances saw the smaller of her abductors sitting in the bow, with his wrists tied together. When the boat bumped against the stone step they could all see the figure of a big man prone in the bottom.

No one in the group realized that Hilda had rushed down from the house and joined them until they heard her sobbing.

Bruce turned to Frances Ivy, his face mirroring his amazement, as Hilda threw her arms around the

blood-stained man the police had helped ashore.

"This is fantastic," Cronin said. "How in the world did Adolf get mixed up in this business?"

The redhead waited until the chief of police had gently disengaged Hilda's arms and gestured for his men to take Adolf and the trussed little man away before she spoke.

"It's a long story, Bruce. It actually starts way back during World War Two, when Adolf was a Nazi soldier, stationed in this village."

Bruce goggled at her. "What's Adolf and World War Two got to do with the Soviet satellite mission and all this crazy, mixed-up killing and kidnaping?"

Frances took Lisa's arm. "Let's get settled on the terrace. I'll try to explain before the chief of police comes back with a lot of questions he would like to have answered.

"First of all," she said, "You must be told that the Soviet satellite mission was not involved in any of this, except indirectly. When the two Russians from the bauxite mines came here they actually thought you might have had something to do with the disappearance of Costa Scarimbas. Obviously, they suspected that he had been spying on them before he vanished. They thought he might have come here to sell you information about their satellite activities."

"But I still don't see—" Bruce began.



Frances Ivy held up a detaining hand. "I'll start by telling you that the trussed-up little man who was carried away with Adolf is the miss-

ing bauxite miner, Costa Scarimbas. I learned from Costa's wife that he was head of a guerilla band during World War Two. As you recall, Adolf said he was stationed in this very village when he deserted from the German army.

"When Costa was last seen heading toward this house, I was convinced he was on the track of the gold that was confiscated from the villagers and later stolen from the Nazis. I decided that the gold and not Adolf's tender sensibilities probably was responsible for his desertion from the German army.

"Mr. Scalesteri told us that there was liaison between certain of the villagers and the guerillas. Costa and some of his men probably were in Petris when the Nazis parachuted in. They could have watched the gold being taken into the warehouse and had ample opportunity to gauge the numerical strength of the military guard that the commandant stationed there. It seems logical that they would have had every chance to see the faces of the guards and remember them. When over a million dollars in gold disappears one is not apt to forget any detail.

"Now, to bring the story to date, Costa's wife said that he often came to Petris to spend money on the girls and drink. Adolf was around the village often, doing the shopping. Costa might easily have recognized him as one of the German guards at the warehouse. We

must assume that he did so and made a deal to help Adolf get the hidden gold out of the country. Actually, Adolf needed just that kind of local help to take the gold out of Greece."

Frances Ivy sighed. "As for Adolf's fellow guards at the warehouse, I imagine that their skeletons are mouldering in one of the hundreds of caves on that island. The fact that he is the only one of them to show up in the village since the war, indicates that he bumped off his companions."

She turned to Lisa. "I thought it odd that an attractive couple like Hilda and Adolf would leave a luxury hotel in Austria to do household chores in this primitive village. They realized, of course, that you and Bruce furnished a heaven-sent opportunity for Adolf to come back here and try to get the gold out of the country, without attracting undue attention."

Jimmy Young, who had been listening, wide-eyed, interrupted her.

"I'll bet the gold is stashed away in the very cave they used as our prison. That's what they were arranging to move by launch and plane when we heard them using the transmitter. That two-way set probably is a hangover from Costa's guerilla warfare days and the plane probably belongs to one of his ex-war-buddies."

"Right you are," said Frances. "Incidentally, my first inkling as to

the whereabouts of the gold stemmed from Hilda's daily swims to the island and the coy act about sunbathing in the nude to keep everyone away as much as possible until they could arrange to move the gold. She made her mistake when she saw you leave with one of the village girls. After the villagers exploded that story, I decided to go into action.

"Last night, my shepherd friend and I placed a lighted lantern in a cave close to Hilda's sunbathing rock. I figured she would see the light, become alarmed over the safety of the gold and inform Adolf. She did just that. Adolf and his accomplice swallowed the bait and led me to the cave where you and the gold were hidden."

Jimmy Young broke in again. His voice was electric with excitement.

"We heard Scarimbas ask someone to come to the island and pick them up in a launch. I didn't see the police bring back anything that looked like a chest full of gold coins. The men contacted by Scarimbas probably are carting off the gold, this very minute. Hadn't we better inform the police?"

Frances Ivy shook her head. "I see no need to inform the police. If they get into the act the gold will be tied up in litigation for years. They've got the men who were responsible for two murders and a kidnaping. Let them think ransom might have been the reason for all this hullabaloo. I can assure you, Adolf and Costa won't mention the gold. They will cling to the hope that they can get to it after they get out of jail."

"Yes, but the men in the launch?" Jimmy Young said. "Do you want them to have the gold?"

The redhead smiled. "Don't worry about the men in the launch. The gold is in the hands of the real owners, the people of this village. My good friend Mr. Scalesteri and his cronies removed it from the cave immediately after the police left with their prisoners."

Frances Bascom Ivy met Bruce's eyes. "You weren't altogether correct in saying that my elderly boyfriend and I wanted to whisper sweet nothings over our coffee, but we did do some constructive whispering. After you left, we put the final touches to this million dollar caper."





FLY AWAY HOME

by JAMES HOLDING

When a two-way crook moves in on a one-way racket—someone is bound to wind up hurt!

I DON'T know to this day whether he was telling me the truth or not.

About the money, I mean. From the label, and the fact that I've heard nothing from him since, I suspect that he was.

As for the other, I'm not so sure. It could easily have been his idea of a joke, fabricated out of whole cloth for my special benefit. For even when we played football together in high school and were the best of friends, he always considered me something of a stuffed shirt.

And he always relished the chance to let a little of my stuffing out when he could.

Knowing him as well as I do,

though, I'd guess he was telling me the truth about that, too.

Not about me being a stuffed shirt. About the restaurant thing.

You know how some men feel about their grandchildren? They like them, all right, but they can't stand to have them around for long. They're glad to see them when they meet, but just as glad to see the last of them when they leave.

It's exactly the way I've felt about Yancey for the last ten years.

Yancey's six feet tall and good looking, with dark curly hair, an aristocratic way of carrying himself, and a couple of ice blue eyes like rifle barrels. He has a high-

pitched, carrying voice, too—perfect for making signals heard over the crowd noise when he played quarterback on our high school team.

He was a good quarterback. Smart and resourceful. Helped us to win the state title two years in a row. In those days, what our big slow-witted linemen (like me) admired the most about Yancey was his instinct for deception, the way he always seemed able to come up with just the right tricky play when we needed one real bad. Oh, yes, Yancey's quite a man.

There's only one thing wrong with him.

He's a bum. An ingratiating, sometimes beguiling bum, of course. But a bum, all the same. Our high school year book blueprinted his future as the boy most likely to succeed. He hasn't followed the blue-print.

He's turned out to be the most bone-lazy, selfish, indifferent, improvident, unashamed, unethical, not to say crooked, player of angles ever graduated from our common alma mater. A deadbeat. A petty grifter, a sponger, a minor irritant operating on the very fringes of the law. That's Yancey. He's never even had enough courage, or initiative, or whatever it takes, to become involved in major dishonesty.

Unless, of course, he was telling the truth about the money.

Anyway. I got back to my office

about two-thirty that Wednesday after making my hospital rounds. I was still new enough in the doctoring business to get a charge out of my name on the door with an M.D. after it. My nurse-secretary didn't give me much time to admire it, though. She said, "Mr. Yancey called, Doctor. He'll be in to see you at four o'clock, or as near to four as you can see him."

I groaned. I was thinking, with half my mind, that I was in for another hundred dollar touch from my old teammate; yet with the other half, I was thinking it would be fun to see old Yancey again. He hadn't been in my office since I'd lent him the last hundred a month ago.

I said he was kind of a beguiling bum, didn't I? Now you see what I mean.

In spite of his unlovely characteristics and his admitted indifference to what I thought of him, I still liked Yancey. Our old football friendship has something to do with it, I suppose. I'm something of a sucker for sentiment, as well as a stuffed shirt. Or maybe it was because Yancey made me feel slightly guilty about my own success in the face of his complete lack of it.

Anyway, I still liked him enough to lend him money which I knew he'd never return. Also to try to point out to him the error of his ways. The last time I'd remonstrated with him (as I gave him a

hundred dollars) he'd merely grinned at me and said, "Still the same old stuffed shirt, aren't you, Jimmy? But thanks for the century. I'll pay you back next week."

I didn't mind his coming to the office to see me. One thing about Yancey, he always looks presentable enough, even distinguished. As he's told me himself, when he sits among my other patients in my waiting room, he actually lends tone to the place. He'd rather starve, or borrow money from me, than wear soiled or shabby clothes.

So I told my nurse okay, I thought I could see Yancey around four, and did we have a hundred dollars in our cash box?

We did. But as things turned out, we didn't need it.

Yancey came in about half an hour late, as might be expected. Through the closed door between us, I could hear him kidding with my nurse in her little office for a minute. Then he beat a tattoo on my consulting room door with his fingers and came in before I could even call to him that it was all right.

"Hi, Jimmy," he greeted me, as though he saw me three times a day, "How's the poor man's Dr. Kildare?"

"I'm going to live," I answered, smiling at him in spite of myself. "How are you?"

"Better than usual, Jimmy. Much better than usual, I'm glad to say."

"What's that supposed to

mean?" He was always healthy as a horse.

"Just what I say. I'm on top of the world today. The very top."

"How come?"

"I got my big break today, Jimmy. The really big one every man waits for. Three hours ago. I wanted you to be the first to know. My old buddy." He simpered at me.

He really did seem to be in a



state of unusual exhilaration. I said, "Well, congratulations, Yancey. Take off your coat and tell me about it."

He shrugged out of his topcoat, a gabardine affair in cool beige that he wore with his usual flair.

"It isn't my coat," he said, "but I'll take it off if you say so." He threw it across a chair.

"It isn't your coat?"

"Nope. That's part of my lucky break. I'll tell you about it in a minute. But first, let me settle my just debts."

He pulled a slab of bills out of his inside jacket pocket thick enough to pass for a thin green brick, and peeled off six bills from the top. He laid them with a loving pat on the top of my desk. "There

you are, Doctor," he said gravely. "That about evens us up, I think. Unless you charge interest on your loans? I wouldn't put it past you, at that." They were all hundreds.

I was too amazed to do anything but push my lower jaw back into place.

He clasped his hands behind his neck and directed his gun-barrel eyes at me. They were dancing and sparkling like sun on glare ice if glare ice ever looks blue. "Aren't you going to thank me?"

"Sure. Thanks a million. What bank did you rob?"

"No bank. You can take the money without a single qualm."

"Gimme, then," I said, stowing the C-notes in my desk drawer. "I doubt that, but I'll take it anyway. At least for now. I never expected to see this dough again."

"I never expected to see it even once." He laughed with pure delight.

I stared at him. "Where'd you get it, Yancey? Stop playing the big mystery man. Did you inherit it?"

"In a way."

"Well, for God's sake, that is a break! Who from?"

"Whom from," Yancey said with his big smile. "You never were much in English, were you, Doc?"

"Good enough to tell the difference between the pronouns 'his' and 'mine,'" I said, "which is more than you can do, Yancey. You stole this dough, didn't you?"

He slipped the big deck of bills back into his pocket and said again, "In a way. I suppose you'd call it that."

"How about telling me the truth and letting me decide for myself what I'd call it? Come on. I've got patients waiting."

He shook his head. "Your waiting room's as empty as a liar's promise. You've got plenty of time, Jimmy. Relax. And let me tell you why this has been the luckiest day of my entire cotton-picking life, will you? I've got to tell somebody or bust."

"Tell me, then. But quick. Before you dirty up my office."

"Okay, Fatso. There's nobody more surprised than me that things turned out lucky today. The day didn't start out lucky, I can tell you that. Just the opposite, in fact. It started out lousy. Even lousier than usual."

"In what way?"

"Don't rush me. It still makes me a little queasy to think about it."

"So don't think about it, tell about it," I said. "Or let me give you a stomachic. I'm a doctor, remember?"

"A what?"

"A stomachic. Something that's good for your stomach. You probably need it."

"Whiskey?"

"Definitely not."

"Then thank you, no. No stomachic. I'll try to control my own

nausea. I got up late this morning on purpose."

"Why?"

"I always do. So I can eat breakfast and lunch at the same time. Brunch. It's cheaper that way. But you wouldn't know that. You're rich."

"Pardon me all to hell. Please go on with your fascinating story, Mr. Yancey."

"That's better, Doc. As I say, it makes me a little sick to remember it. It would you, too, so don't get that patronizing look on your beat-up face, Jimmy. Why, I wonder, do tackles always get their noses broken?" He shrugged. "Anyway, I went over to Morrisey's Restaurant for brunch about one o'clock, wearing my topcoat because it turned cold last night."

"Morrisey's is a pretty fancy restaurant," I said, meaning for him.

He gave me a look. "That's the best kind. I hung my coat on the coat rack near the cashier's desk and found a table by myself along one side. The joint was pretty well filled. I ordered chicken pot pie and was almost finished eating it when I saw something floating in the bottom of my casserole in the chicken gravy." He shuddered. "I mean, Jimmy, after I'd eaten almost the whole thing, to find something like that in the gravy!"

"Something like what? What was it?"

He took a breath. "It was a

ladybug. And take my word for it, she looked plenty red against that yellow chicken gravy! Also plenty dead. She had her wings spread out like she had been making a last desperate try to get the hell out of that casserole before she was covered with dough and baked in the oven! Do you blame me for feeling like heaving?"

I grinned. "No," I said. "But it could have been worse. A cockroach, say."

"All right. You think it was a joke." He was indignant. "So forget it. I wouldn't even mention it, except that in a crazy way, the dead ladybug was responsible for my big break."

He paused with a hurt look on his face until I apologized for interrupting and asked him to continue.

He said, "I called my waiter over and pointed out the ladybug in the gravy. It shook him up pretty bad, too. He began to wave his hands and explain that such a thing had never happened at Morrisey's before. Then, for God's sake, he offered to bring me another chicken pot pie! Can you believe it? I told him it was all I could do to keep down the one I'd swallowed already. I wasn't about to eat another one that might have two dead insects in it, for all I knew."

Picturing the scene in Morrisey's Restaurant, I couldn't keep from laughing. Yancey didn't often get

offended, I knew, but when he did, he got very offended indeed.

"I guess I must have raised my voice a little," Yancey went on, "because the people at the tables around mine began to turn their heads my way."

"No wonder," I said, remembering Yancey's signal-calling voice.

"Anyway, in about three seconds flat the manager of the joint—maybe it was Morrisey himself, for all I know—came galloping up. He waved my waiter to one side and whispered that unless I lowered my voice, and please, please, accepted his abject apologies for the ladybug, I'd ruin his restaurant and I didn't want to do that, did I?"

"I told him I didn't give a damn whether I ruined his business or not, I wasn't used to ladybugs in my pot pie. But I *did* lower my voice, the poor guy seemed so upset. I let him escort me to the door, tearing up my lunch check on the way, and still apologizing like crazy. He asked me if I had a coat, and I said yes, and pointed to it hanging on the rack by the cashier's desk. He was so anxious to get me out of his restaurant without a scene that he pulled the wrong coat off the rack and helped me into it.

"It was the same color as mine. The same material. And it fit me all right. It was several years newer than mine, too. So I didn't correct his mistake. That's it over there."

Yancey jerked a thumb at the topcoat on my office chair, and gave me his punch line. "It had seventeen thousand dollars in cash in the right hand pocket," he said. "In a brown envelope." Dramatically he paused and looked at me in triumph.

I gulped. "You're kidding, Yancey! I hope. If not, you can't *keep* the coat and the money! They're not yours!"

"That's true," he said calmly, watching me. "They're not mine. And whose do you think they are?"

"Whose?"

"Big Al Martine's. Ever hear of him?"

"Ye-e-s, I think so."

"He's a racketeer. Biggest in the city. Up to his neck in dope, numbers, girls, everything crooked we've got here. This money is *dirty* money, Jimmy, real dirty, if it's his. And it's his. His name's on the label inside the topcoat pocket. The way I see it, I got as much right to money like this as Big Al has. He must have been on the way to the bank when he stopped off for lunch." Yancey chuckled. "Seventeen grand! In cash! And a practically new topcoat besides!" He went on chortling and congratulating himself, but he kept a sharp eye on me, I noticed.

Finally he stopped his play-acting and said to me, "You're not going to turn fink on me, are you, Jimmy? I didn't need to tell you this, remember. I didn't need to

pay you back your six C's. But I thought you'd enjoy the gag. Are you going to blow it for me?"

I thought about it a minute. Then I said, "Let me see the label in the coat."

He went over and brought the coat to me, turning the inside pocket out to show me the label sewn to the pocket lining. Martine's name was there all right, written in blue ink.

"See?" Yancey said.

I nodded. "What about your own topcoat? Was *your* name in it?"

"That's the first thing I asked myself after I found the dough. You think I'm stupid? The answer is no. My topcoat had another guy's name in it. No sweat."

"Another guy's? Did you steal that one, too?"

"I won it in a crap game. And the guy who owned it is dead. Word of honor."

"Well," I said, "that leaves the restaurant manager. He'll describe you to Martine."

"Let him. I've been hiding in a blonde's walk-up I happen to have the key to, ever since. And I'm leaving town tonight, going a long way off. He'll never find me, Jimmy. Satisfied?"

"No. You ought to return the

coat and money, Yancey. Even if it *is* Martine's. You know that as well as I do." I hesitated. "But I must admit I don't feel too strongly about it, though."

"That's my good old reliable stuffed shirt," Yancey said approvingly. "It isn't as though Big Al was going to starve to death without the money in this coat."

"I guess he won't."

"I *know* he won't. If he got my topcoat at Morrisey's in exchange for his, he'll find something in *my* pocket, too."

"What?"

"Most of my capital. In fact all of it."

"Capital? I didn't know you had any."

He sniffed. "Enough to take care of three square meals a day for awhile, anyway."

"Yeah," I said scathingly, "at the Salvation Army."

"Oh, no. At the best damn restaurants in town."

I looked at him. I could tell he was leading up to something. But I just couldn't help asking the question.

"What *did* you leave in your own topcoat pocket, Yancey?"

He gave me his best grin.

"Three more ladybugs and a housefly," he said.



The Frightened Witness

One scared girl could free him—or send him to the chair. There was only one thing to do about it. She had to die before morning!

by ROY A. ELLIOTT

BECAUSE HIS right hand clutched the paper shopping bag stuffed with delicatessen and light groceries, Hubbard lifted his left fist to rap out the signal on the apartment door—three soft taps, then two quickly.



The door opened promptly and Thelmeta James stood there spotlit in the bright glow from the interior. She wore sheer pink pajamas beneath a black brocade rajah coat decorated with golden dragons whose multiple heads nestled between her breasts and writhed with her breathing.

She smiled as though she had looked forward to his visit with extreme pleasure.

Del Hubbard motioned her back and stepped inside.

"I could have knocked you over with a popgun," he said. "The idea is to keep you alive. You're no good to us dead."

"I'm sorry, Lieutenant—Del," she said. "But it all seems so unreal. I get so bored cooped up in this tiny place."

"A coffin isn't nearly as big," Hubbard assured her. He studied the gamin face, the sea-green eyes, the cascade of spun sugar hair spilling over her shoulders, the exquisite figure subtly advertised by what she had chosen to wear.

"I'm here for just one purpose," he added unnecessarily. "To keep you alive long enough to identify Putzy Schaffer in court." He carried the shopping bag back to the miniature kitchen.

As he turned, she made a tentative movement with a masked gleam in her eyes. The glint in his stopped her.

"You and I are just a cop and a material witness who could get

knocked off," he said. "We're expendable."

Hubbard turned again to the shopping bag, fished out a pack of cigarettes and tossed it to her. "I knew you didn't have any, but it wasn't safe to come earlier. I had to put Putzy's boys to bed first."

He sat beside her on the studio couch that doubled as a bed and chatted for twenty minutes. She had been locked up here for three days and needed the release of conversation.

"Del, do you actually believe Putzy would harm me?" she asked.

"His friends are trying their best to find you and shut your mouth," he said. "It isn't even a personal matter. Putzy probably likes you very much. But you're a threat to his security. He'll take any possible steps he can to eliminate the danger to him."

Hubbard ran a big, freckled hand over his sandy crew cut and drew himself up to his six-feet-three. He had seen that he must leave. The room had grown stuffy and she had unbuttoned her coat. Her pajamas seemed to be made of the same stuff as cobwebs.

"Putzy and I had such good times together," she said wistfully. "He gave me such nice presents. Putzy's a real sport."

"He's also a real killer," Hubbard said. "Right now he's looking his eyes out for an opportunity to commit another murder—yours." He looked down at her.

"The Putzy I know wouldn't hurt a fly," she said.

"Jake Dolman isn't the only man Putzy's laid the hit on," Hubbard said. "And if you don't help to nail him while you've got a chance, your life won't be worth a phony dime."

He took out a pen and notebook and made a list of the things she said she wanted: more cigarettes, a couple of movie magazines, a bottle of shampoo. He departed via the basement and a small side window to his car, parked two streets away.

He drove to headquarters for a confab with Ed Cantwell, the homicide chief. He liked to maintain liaison with headquarters. It paid off when problems arose. He was reasonably sure that Cantwell would still be at his desk. Cantwell never left headquarters as long as he could think of an excuse for remaining.

"How's the baby sitter?" Cantwell asked as Lieutenant Hubbard flopped wearily into a chair. Cantwell was a stubby man, wearing black-rimmed glasses that made him look owlish.

"Okay," Hubbard said. "Just bored and restless. She can't picture Putzy doing anything to hurt her."

"Want me to put some men on her and give you a little rest?"

"It would take three shifts of three men each to do the job right, Ed. You got them to spare? The coming and going would give it

away. This way, we risk only two lives."

"I guess I'm an old-fashioned cop," Cantwell said. "I still think a material witness in a murder case belongs in jail."

"You couldn't keep her in jail an hour, Ed. Putzy's shysters are sitting with wrists and bail-dough clutched in their hot little hands. And the minute she hit the sidewalk she'd be the most beautiful corpse you ever saw."

"Well, she's your baby," Cantwell said. "Yours and the D.A.'s."

"I don't like the sound of that," Hubbard said. "I'm going home to bed."

Strictly speaking, Hubbard had no home. A bachelor, he lived in furnished rooms, efficiencies, small hotels. Just now he was camped in a tiny apartment almost identical with the one in which the girl was concealed, and directly across the street from it.

He was staked out there, resolved to preserve her life long enough for her appearance as a prosecution witness in the murder trial of Putzy Schaffer, even at the risk of his own.

He had a special kind of hatred for the protected ones, the ones the law couldn't reach because they were clever and had resources. Much too long to please Del Hubbard, Putzy Schaffer had dominated the local gambling world and the crooked money fringe of the sports milieu. The man he was ac-

cused of murdering had been a model citizen by comparison.

Hubbard looked out the window at the dark flat across the street. He picked up the rifle with the telescopic sight which leaned against the wall in the near corner. He checked the loading and mechanism, although he knew they were all right. He set the rifle back against the wall and lifted the binoculars from the window sill.

Through the glasses he scanned the building opposite and the shadowy sidewalks below. The night seemed static and permanent. What lurked in dim halls and recessed doorways, he could only imagine. He went to bed on the couch drawn up beside the window and let his mind worry the situation to see if that would produce any useful ideas. It helped sometimes.

A vague and repressed sort of personal rivalry had existed for years between Putzy Schaffer and Jake Dolman. Hubbard suspected that its basis had been Dolman's peculiar knack for deflating Putzy's ego.

On the surface they had been friends. Dolman, a shrewd, spry gnome with a big bald head, had owned a large, glittery supper club where Thelmeta James worked as chief hostess, with a staff of beauties under her direction.

Her principal duties were to wear provocative clothing and smile at the favored male patrons in her wistful, little-girl manner.

This made the older men wish to be her father, and the younger ones crave an even closer relationship, and made all of them come back to spend their money in Jake Dolman's Club Caprice.

Putzy swaggered in one night, a tall, rugged hoodlum with a swarthy complexion and a low forehead. He liked to be known as an invincible gambler, a man who could beat any odds. He was aware that Dolman's opinion of him failed to approach this image.

Putzy went straight back to Dolman's private office, where the proprietor was entertaining a group of friends. Pausing dramatically in the doorway, Putzy lifted his hands for silence. When he had succeeded in interrupting the conversation, he bestowed the benefit of his toothy smile, which contracted his forehead further.

"Gentlemen!" he boomed. "What's your proposition? I'll bet any amount on anything, and give or take any odds!"

The visitors concealed their disgust according to their individual capacities. Some failed. Dolman was too courteous to snub Putzy before the group.

"Who wants a bet?" Putzy shouted, advancing through the fog of expensive cigar smoke. "You guys afraid to risk a little dough? It's only money, gentlemen. You can't take it with you."

Ice tinkled as someone set a drink down. With a hip propped on

Dolman's desk, a leg swinging in sharply creased trousers, Putzy repeated his challenge.

"Who wants to gamble?" The guests looked at each other.

"Name your poison, Putzy," Dolman said quietly.

Putzy studied the ceiling for inspiration, rubbed the blue-black stubble on his chin.

"Gimme a pair of bones," he said. "I'll throw seven for a hundred big ones."

"Are you saying," Dolman queried, "that you'll throw seven on the first roll or give me a hundred thousand dollars?"

"Your hearing is real good," Putzy said. "If I throw it, you give me a hundred grand."

Dolman opened a desk drawer, took out a handful of dice and dropped them on the blotter. "I'll take all of that," he said.

Putzy tested two pairs of dice in his hand with his fist against his ear, dropped them and selected another pair. He shook these in his fist, listening to the rattle.

"A single toss, gentlemen," he said. "It's going to put a hundred grand in little Putzy's sock."

He passed the dice from hand to hand, from one hand to the other behind his back. He rattled them, blew on them, talked to them. He spun around on one heel twice and rolled the cubes out on the desk. Five and two showed.

"Wowie!" Putzy yelled. He hopped up and down on one foot

and hugged himself with his arms. "Write the check, Jake!"

"Just a minute," Dolman said. He picked up the dice, held them between thumb and forefinger, turned them about to study the flat surfaces. He held them above the desk pad and dropped them. Five and two showed.

He repeated the test twice with identical results.

"These are not my dice," he said. "I never owned a loaded pair in my life."

"Now, wait a second," Putzy protested. He stepped forward to examine the dice. "These are not the dice I threw. You've rung in a crooked pair. You're trying to welsh."

Glancing around the circle of disapproving faces, Putzy threw his hands in the air and stalked out, stiff with indignation. In the days immediately following, witnesses heard him complain long and loudly that a gambling debt was a matter of personal integrity, not merely a financial transaction. His unflattering opinion of a welsher gained wide circulation.

On arraignment, Putzy claimed that he never saw Dolman alive again. But the club owner was shot to death in his office one night a week after the dice casting. It was just after the closing hour of four and most of the help had gone home. A couple of hostesses, the late shift cook and a few busboys were on the premises. They said

they neither saw nor heard anything unusual.

Although Putzy was reputedly a good friend, Thelmeta James told Hubbard during the investigation that she would not countenance murder, no matter by whom committed. Jake Dolman had been like a father to her. He'd taken her from behind a soda fountain and made her one of the town's outstanding glamor girls.

When she heard the shot, she rushed back to Dolman's office. She had heard of Putzy's reckless talk. It was Putzy Schaffer she saw sneaking out through the French window. He had known he'd been seen and by whom.

Before she went to bed, Thelmeta had been warned in an anonymous phone call to keep her pretty trap buttoned unless she wanted the same dose given her employer.

In the morning, Hubbard looked out the window again. The man on whom the binoculars focused was entering a building in the next block. He carried a stack of magazines under an arm, but Hubbard knew he was not working his way through college. He was searching for Thelmeta's hideout, and if he found it, he would, unless thwarted, casually and efficiently kill her. With her would die the case against Putzy Schaffer.

The other evidence against him was circumstantial and not particularly strong. No murder weapon had been found. The state probably

could discredit his alibi by attacking the witnesses, most of whom had police records. But Thelmeta's finger was needed to place him at the crime scene at the crucial moment.

Hubbard watched the building across the street, hoping Thelmeta would have sense enough not to open the door when the bogus salesman rang.

He was not sure she would. She had exercised no caution when Hubbard had visited her. The apartment supposedly was vacant. There was no name plate on the door. The windows were blacked out with blankets hung over the Venetian blinds.

As Hubbard gazed, Thelmeta raised a blind. She wriggled her small shoulders out of her pajama jacket, beneath which she wore nothing. Stretching her arms above her head, she took several deep breaths, then disappeared.

Hubbard fancied that she smiled in his direction, and acquired a new cause for worry. He didn't want to look at her body, damn it, and he didn't want her to smile at him. He didn't want anything around him that Putzy Schaffer had touched.

Late that night he went to deliver the things he'd bought for her. A strong sense of uneasiness depressed him as he dropped through the window into the dark cellar. It was a familiar premonition of trouble, a policeman's sixth sense.



He stood for a moment trying to gauge its possible source. Nothing was obviously amiss. He loosened his gun in its holster and went ahead.

He was halfway to the stairs when the heavy weight fell on his shoulders. A murderous blow glanced off the side of his head, landing painfully on his left shoulder. Almost at once his shoulder and arm went numb.

He reached for his gun, but another blow staggered him. He loosed the handles of the shopping bag and let it rest on the floor.

He groped behind him with his hands. His fingers clutched trousers legs. Ducking his head, he heaved forward. The unseen assailant flew over Hubbard's head, landing on his back on the rough concrete. He lay still, momentarily stunned. Hubbard got out his flash and turned the beam down.

He didn't know the man, but he knew the type well enough to conclude that he was one of Putzy's people, probably an imported trigger. Hubbard was considering his next step when the fellow came to

and turned on his side. He grasped Hubbard's trousers cuffs and rolled, dragging Hubbard off his feet. The flash sailed out of his hand and clattered on the concrete somewhere behind him.

He found himself on his back in the dark, and heard the other man scrambling to rise. The rapid scrape of his shoes suggested that he was searching in the dark for Hubbard.

Hubbard rolled twice, struggled to his own feet and grasped a handful of lapels. He aimed a piledriver blow that glanced off a hard jaw. A blow caught Hubbard on the chin and set him back on his heels.

His grip on the man's jacket kept him on his feet. He made certain that his next blow went home. He felt his fist bore into soft midriff and air hiss as the man went double. Hubbard sensed the movement he could not see, and flailed down with a chopping stroke to the back of the thug's neck. He dropped.

Hubbard picked him up and deposited him in the coal bin. Brushing dust from his clothes, he picked up the shopping bag and went toward the stairway. He speculated on whether he had so surprised the thug that he'd attacked reflexively, or if the fellow had entertained some notion of forcing a revelation of Thelmeta's whereabouts.

She opened the door to his signal. Again she was weary of confinement, and Hubbard understood. But he denied her the comfort of his sympathy.

"It's better than being dead," he said, relating his encounter with the thug in the basement. "They have ideas about where you are. If they keep playing they're bound to hit the jackpot. Maybe that's the best solution. I'm getting tired of sticking my neck out for a friend of Putzy Schaffer's."

"If you get paid for being nasty, you're working overtime," she said. "Sometimes I'm not sure it was Putzy I saw that night. Couldn't it have been just someone who looks like Putzy?"

"All we want you to do is go into court and tell what you saw. Don't tell anything you didn't see."

"Oh, let's talk about something else," she said. "Let's talk about us." She moved to the end of the couch, sat on its arm and dangled a small, white hand over his shoulder. "You big ape," she said. "Aren't you human?"

"Sometimes I wonder," Hubbard said. "Control the urge till I phone Cantwell to pick up this bum in the cellar. I want him out of circulation for a while."

On the day set for Putzy Schaffer's trial, Del Hubbard felt entitled to congratulate himself. His cover was still intact. Thelmeta was still alive in her tiny apartment. He picked her up quietly with an unmarked police car and started downtown to the courthouse.

The black car, driven by a plain-clothes cop, was rolling along a wide, suburban boulevard where

kids played on sidewalks and grassy lawns.

The compact sedan, fleet and equally inconspicuous, glided from a side street and quickly drew abreast of the police car. A shotgun and two revolvers raked the police vehicle a second after the wary Hubbard spotted it in the side mirror and yelled, "Look out!"

He dropped to the floor, yanking Thelmeta down after him.

The driver, hit in the head, neck, and arm, was seriously wounded. The car, out of control, swerved toward the sidewalk and rammed a utility pole. The grill and radiator folded inward. The sedan vanished down the boulevard.

Hubbard crawled out of the wreckage, took the quaking blonde by the hand, and headed for a shopping center drugstore. He phoned for an ambulance for the driver.

Returning to the street with Thelmeta, he hailed a taxi to complete the trip downtown. It seemed quicker than calling for another police car. He said, "Make it snappy, buddy," to the driver and turned to look at Thelmeta.

She was pressing back into her corner as though to avoid physical contact. Her face was pale. He attributed it to the harrowing experience they had passed through, and didn't disturb her mood. They had covered half the distance into the city before she spoke.

"Stop the car, driver," she said.
"What's wrong?" Del Hubbard

asked. The cab slowed and angled to the curb. "Don't stop here," Hubbard ordered the driver.

He glanced at his watch. It was 9:40. Court convened at ten o'clock, and the remainder of the trip would take fifteen minutes under favorable traffic conditions, longer if they ran into jams.

The cab stopped.

"Go ahead, man," Hubbard commanded the driver.

"The lady says stop," the cabby retorted. "With me, the lady's word goes. How do I know it ain't a snatch or something?"

Hubbard lost patience. "Go ahead before I bust you one!"

"You and which army?" The cabby leaned forward. When he straightened, his meaty fist clutched a tire iron. "Now let's see you bust me one."

"Listen, fellow," Hubbard said. "This is police business. I'm from the district attorney's office."

"The lady under arrest?" he demanded.

"Not exactly."

"Then she don't have to go nowhere with a smart guy like you. You ain't no regular cop. I know all the regulars." Still clutching the metal strip, he got out and opened the rear door.

Thelmeta stepped out. Hubbard followed. The cabby drove away.

"What's the matter with you?" Hubbard asked.

"I won't go on," she said. "If I testify they'll kill me. I shouldn't

have talked to you. I should have kept my mouth shut."

"They won't try to kill you after the damage is done," he assured her. "They're not interested in revenge. They can't afford a murder that accomplishes nothing."

It was ten minutes to ten before he succeeded in re-convincing her that it was her civic duty to testify.

He looked up and down the street for a taxi. None was in sight. He looked for a police cruiser. They were all cruising other streets. A bus lumbered toward them, but it offered no hope of reaching the courthouse in time. Hubbard scratched his sandy head.

At five minutes to ten he stopped a taxi that didn't look as if it would hold together long enough to get downtown.

The courtroom was crowded when they entered at ten minutes past ten. The cabby had crowded his hack. The jury of nine men and three women squirmed, coughed, and cleared its collective throat. The spectators imitated the jury. Half a dozen of Putzy's sycophants occupied front benches.

The black-robed judge looked dignified and remote on his bench. The defendant, broad-shouldered and arrogant, lounged at the counsel table with an imposing group of attorneys. Witnesses testified to the wager between Putzy and Jake Dolman, the casting of the die, Putzy's subsequent remarks.

Thelmeta was called.

"Please tell the court and jury where you are employed," the D.A. directed. He was a spruce, keen-eyed young man named Mark Petaway, alert, cool, confident.

"Club Caprice," Thelmeta said.

"In what capacity?"

"Chief hostess."

"You are familiar with the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr. Dolman?"

"Yes."

"Where were you when he died?"

"In his office."

"You stated to the police that you heard a shot and saw a man leaving Mr. Dolman's office by the French window."

"That is true."

"Do you see that man in this courtroom—the man you saw leaving Mr. Dolman's office after he was shot?"

"That's him." Thelmeta pointed.

"Mr. Schaffer."

"How can you be sure?"

"The office lights were on. Mr. Schaffer turned and looked back as though he wanted to see who had entered the office. I was face to face with him at a distance of seven feet, according to the police measurements. A mistake just wasn't possible."

They didn't wait for the rest of the day's session. Del Hubbard knew that Thelmeta's testimony had clinched the state's case.

Schaffer would be convicted of murder.

Because no other arrangements had been made for Thelmeta, they returned to the hideout apartment. She went about collecting personal things. Hubbard went to the window and looked at the building across the street. This wrapped it up, he thought. She wouldn't need protection any more. He was somewhat surprised to find the idea unpleasant.

She spoke quietly behind him. "Well, I identified Putzy. All right if I go now?"

"All right," he muttered. She started for the door, but turned and came up behind him.

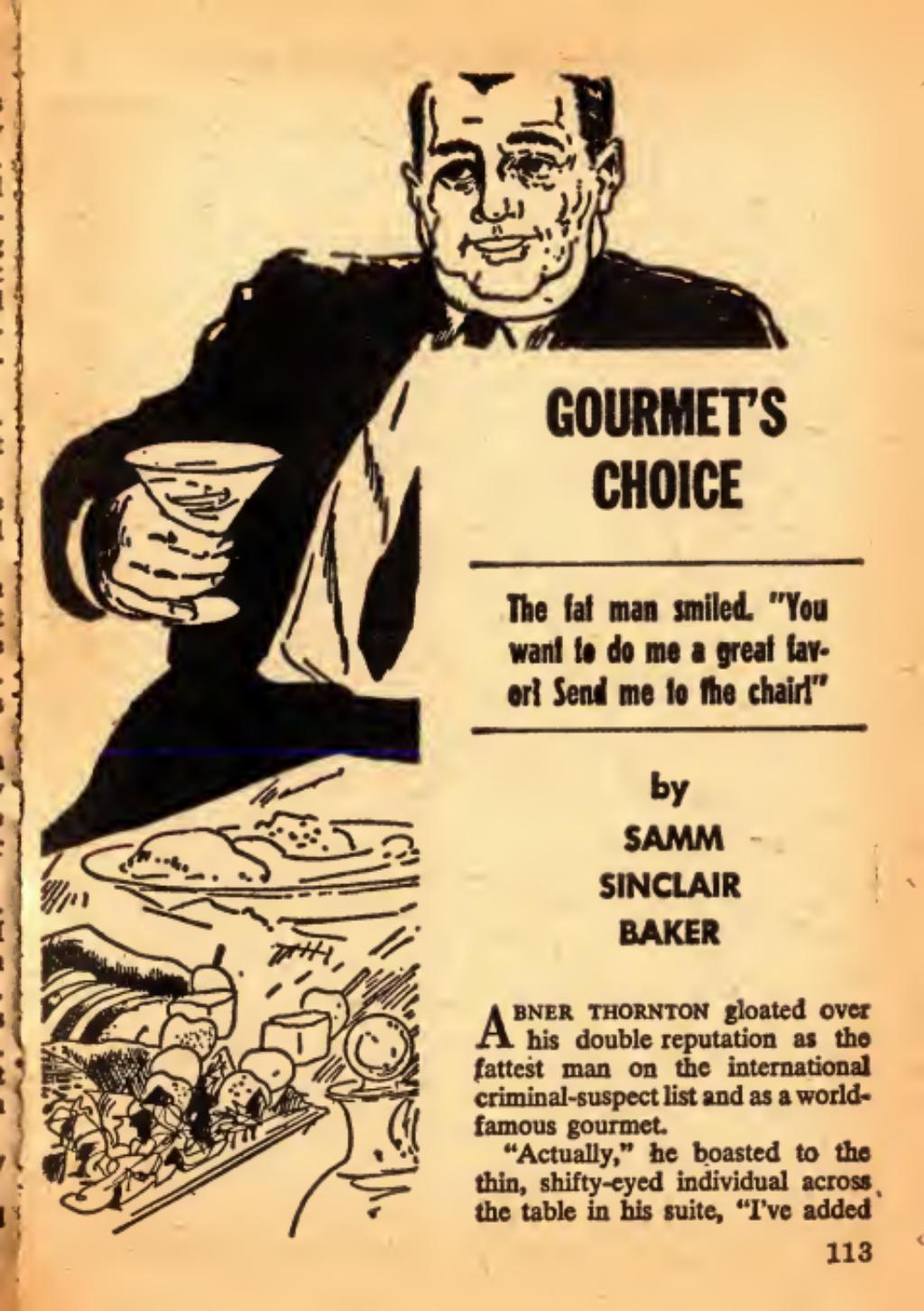
"I'll tell you something you didn't know," she said. "Jake left me a piece of the place. A big piece —half. You can run the joint, Del. You can have it, at least half. It's pretty good, Del."

He turned it over in his mind a couple of times. It was undeniably attractive. After a moment he turned and put his hands on her shoulders.

"You're a nice kid," he said. "But I'm so used to being poor I wouldn't know what to do with money. I'm a cop in plain clothes. Just a D.A.'s investigator. That's what I've always thought I wanted. Guess I'll have to stick with it. But I'll stop in and have a drink with you sometimes."

Thelmeta James turned away quickly.

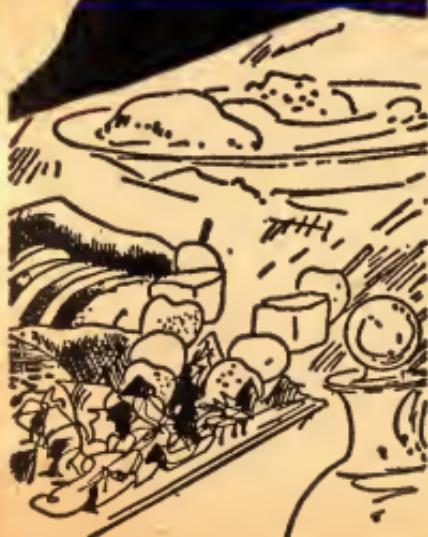
"You go to hell!" she said, and slammed the door hard.



GOURMET'S CHOICE

The fat man smiled. "You want to do me a great favor? Send me to the chair!"

by
**SAMM SINCLAIR
BAKER**



ABNER THORNTON gloated over his double reputation as the fattest man on the international criminal-suspect list and as a world-famous gourmet.

"Actually," he boasted to the thin, shifty-eyed individual across the table in his suite, "I've added

thirty-two delicious pounds since I last saw you two years ago."

His pig eyes glinted. Behind them he thought: this specimen intends to extort money from me; I'd kill him rather than pay a penny. Aloud he said, "Weighed in this morning at 316 precious pounds—"

"I don't give a damn if you're over a thousand pounds!" his dining companion interrupted. He threw his linen napkin down on the table top, one end falling into a plate, thirstily soaking up the rich, dark sauce of breast of chicken Perigourdine. He'd hardly touched the epicurean food. Afflicted with chronic ulcers, Shifty Morel was a poor eater at best.

His scowl tightened the skin over his skull-like features. "I didn't drag you a couple of thousand miles from the other side of the world to talk about your stinkin' grease—"

The heavy man's eyes turned as white-cold as the ice cubes in the champagne bucket at his elbow. With an obvious effort he controlled his rage.

"You shouldn't waste those succulent chicken breasts, Shifty," he said. "The sauce is enhanced with choice truffles and topped with the most luscious pate de fois gras."

Morel grunted rudely.

The fat man patted his swelling stomach. "My friend, these pounds have cost me hundreds of thousands of dollars, and worth every

cent. I live only to eat. If deprived of the world's most exquisite gourmet viands, I'd rather die, and quickly. No question about it."

He belched happily. "Ah, the chervil, basil and eau-de-Cologne mint in that superb salad—I can taste them all again."

"The hell with food!" Morel snapped. "I came to talk about money. Big money. Hundreds of thousands of dollars. You have it. I helped you get it. I need some—now!"

Thornton frowned, lifted a massive hand to stop further talk. He swiveled his head toward the serving table near the door. A waiter was bending over it, half turned away, stacking soiled dishes.

The fat man growled, "Waiter!"

The man straightened his muscular frame, squared his shoulders unconsciously. He half bowed his head. "Yes, sir?"

Thornton regarded him carefully, noting the intelligent eyes, the athletic figure. Even for the Ambassador Towers, New York's most luxurious hotel, this was a superior breed of waiter. Shrugging imperceptibly, he ordered, "Out!"

"As soon as I clear up, sir."

"Out. Right now! I've signed the check—generously. So don't come back." He emphasized, "We don't want to be interrupted. I'll call down in a couple of hours to get the rest of this cleared away."

"Yes, sir. But—"

"Out!" The gross face was turn-

ing dangerously purple. Shifty Morel watched apprehensively, aware of Thornton's flaring temper from earlier days. He squelched a chill of fear, told himself—got to get the money. Even the ruthless fat man wouldn't dare risk violence here.

The waiter was wheeling the service table out of the room. He turned and pulled the door closed softly, shutting off his watchful eyes.

In the spacious suite, the still-angry behemoth rumbled, "I didn't like getting your phone calls overseas, Shifty. I left this country two years ago vowing never to return. I milked the richest juices from this town, was through with it. They couldn't pin anything on me but they were getting too close. I've refused to read or hear a word about this place, blotted it out of my consciousness—"

He roared, "I've had to come back because of your threats. His mountainous pulp trembled as he sought self-control. "They haven't anything on me—yet. And I'll keep it that way. Understand?"

The quivering paw reached for his champagne glass, drained the contents in one gulp. He closed his eyes, breathed raspingly, his body heaving. Gradually the tremors subsided. He opened his eyes, squinting icily. Quietly, "Well, Shifty?"

Morel unlocked his hands. His tongue darted out, licked his tight

lips. "The district attorney's men have been after me since you left the country. They want evidence against you."

He stopped, gulped in air, continued defiantly, "You know I've got the evidence. I'll use it if you force me to. Then you couldn't escape them, no matter how far you ran. That's why you came back. You knew I had you cornered."

Thornton breathed thickly, his gaze fixed on the skeletal grey face. "Go on."

Morel whined, "I've had bad luck since you left. Gambling, stocks, horses, the tables—mostly the tables."

"None of my concern. I paid you off well." He reached for both champagne glasses, filled them from the magnum he lifted out of the frosted bucket.

"It's got to be your concern! I owe big gambling money. They said they'll kill me if I don't pay up. I helped you get away with over a million. I need a hundred thousand dollars now." He stopped, shrilled, "Now! Or else I'm dead—"

The deep, ominous voice echoed slowly, "And if I choose not to give the money to you?"

The hollow-eyed man gripped the table with both hands until the sharp knuckles threatened to pierce through the tight skin. He screeched, "I'll spill to the D.A. I've got to. At least he'll give me

protection from the others. From you—”

Thornton's thick fingers fumbled in a pocket of his light grey vest as he said, “You'd better change your mind.”

Morel croaked, “I can't. If I don't pay up I get killed. My only out is the D.A.”

The layered face slowly loosened into an unconvincing grin. The hard eyes held Morel's. Softly, soothingly, “I understand, Shifty. Relax.” His hand hovered over the other man's champagne glass, the thumb and forefinger separating, hidden from his companion.

He pressed the back of his hand against his pulpy lips. “You ruined my dinner,” he scolded. “A shame . . . the ramekins of shrimp in pink sour cream . . . the incomparable Vichysoisse Verte as only the Ambassador's Raymonde makes it. Worth coming back for that alone—and now you have spoiled it.”

Morel's lips writhed in silent curse. He demanded, “Do I get the money?”

The thick eyebrows on the moon face lifted slightly. He spoke lightly, “Of course.” He reached out, picked up his filled champagne glass. “Of course I'll pay you off, Shifty. You don't leave me much choice, do you?” He raised his glass toward Morel who had sagged back in his chair in relief. “Let's drink to it.”

The exhausted man shook his

head weakly. “No. You drink both glasses. I can't. My stomach—”

The fat man roared, “Damn your stomach! You boor, this is Dom Perignon nineteen fifty-five!” He lowered his voice, “We drink to our bargain like a pair of gentlemen, or it's all off and to the devil with you.” He assayed a smile which became a hideous distortion of fleshy creases. “A toast to our mutual futures.”

The scrawny hand picked up the bubbling drink, drew it reluctantly to his slitted mouth. Grimacing, he gulped down the contents to get it over with. Almost instantly he exploded a strangled cry, dropped the glass, clawed at his throat with both hands. He fell back, rigid fingers still hooked at his throat, dead eyes rolled up at the ceiling.

The fat man rose ponderously to a surprising six feet. His expressionless face was a mottled magenta as he loomed over the slight corpse. He pursed his lips in thought.

He moved stiff-legged to the phone, picked up the receiver, dialed a number. He stood erect, stomach swelling, his back to the dead man and the door. He didn't hear or see the door open and close.

He spoke softly, “Ludvic? Thornton here. I have a package for you to get rid of, as we discussed this afternoon. Bring Riker along. The Ambassador Towers. Suite seventeen C. Hurry.”

Replacing the receiver, he lifted both hands to his face, kneading the hot, bulging cheeks, breathing hoarsely. He turned back toward the table, stopped abruptly. He stared, lowered his arm slowly to his sides.

The waiter was facing him, back against the door. The fat man's eyes roved to the rigid figure on the chair then returned to the standing man. He said, "You're not just a waiter."

The muscular man answered, "District attorney's office, Mr. Thornton. My name is Cory, Ray Cory."

Thornton nodded, his expression bland, even faintly amused. "You don't look like a waiter." He moved sluggishly, his left hand feeling toward his heart through the layers of fat. He settled again into his chair at the table. His stomach rumbling, he reached out and refilled his glass with champagne.

Cory crossed the room, used the phone, spoke into it briefly. He returned to his previous position, back against the door. He said; "I'll be interested in meeting Ludvic and Riker too when they arrive."

Thornton glared, then shrugged and raised his glass. "I don't suppose you'll join me in some bubbly? Dom Perignon '55—" He glanced toward the dead man, burst into uproarious laughter, explained, "Morel didn't enjoy it."

He quieted, sipped, relaxed. "It doesn't really matter," he said. "I



half expected to be caught. It's worth it to get rid of that slime." He indicated the dead man.

"Why did you kill him? You took a big chance."

"Why?" The fat man reddened. "He threatened me! He demanded one hundred thousand dollars. Hush money, I believe it's called. One hundred thousand dollars this time. How much next time?"

He paused, reflected, nodded. "But it wasn't just the money. I'm a man of great appetites, Mr. Cory. I possess strong emotions and vengeance is one of them. If I don't satisfy my appetites I find it difficult to live peaceably with myself. Morel had to be eliminated for his presumption in threatening me, if for nothing else."

He giggled at his own mischief like a naughty child. He went on: "Morel started hounding me overseas with demands in letters, cables, calls." He frowned. "It was starting to spoil my appetite—I couldn't have that."

Cory said, "You'll be paying a high price for vengeance."

The fat man shook his head, answered indulgently, "No, Mr. Cory. The joke is on you, on the authorities."

Puzzled, "How so?"

Thornton laughed exultantly. He filled his glass again, drank deeply, gurgling with sensual satisfaction.

His breath caught; he was shaken by a fit of coughing. Cory watched silently.

The red-faced murderer recovered his voice. "My friend, I live only to eat. Recently the doctors told me I had but a few more months to live unless I took off weight. I'd rather not live without savoring to the fullest the finest foods the world can provide. So I eat as I choose, and thus I choose to die."

Thick laughter erupted from deep within him.

Cory asked, "What has that to do with being convicted of murder?"

"It should be obvious," the bit man said. "I'll plead guilty, get a quick trip to the electric chair. I'd soon be dead anyhow. So I have my cake and eat it too, so to speak." He smirked. "The joke is on you. I get my revenge." He gestured at the corpse. "You pull the switch."

The muscular man was shaking his head. "The joke is on you, Mr. Thornton. You've been away from this country too long. Two years without any contact. The joke is on you."

The broad face frowned, then

pushed forward. He demanded, "How so?"

"On June first, nineteen sixty-five, Governor Rockefeller signed a law abolishing capital punishment in New York State. You'll be convicted of murder, yes. But no quick death in the electric chair. You'll spend the rest of your life in prison."

The staring, bloodied eyes roved wildly.

Bubbles of saliva dribbled out between the thick lips.

"No," he blurred between labored breaths, "no, you can't do that to me."

"Did you ever eat prison food, Mr. Thornton?" The fleshy head rocked as with unbearable pain. "Nourishing, but there's none less palatable. Uninspired food, Mr. Thornton.

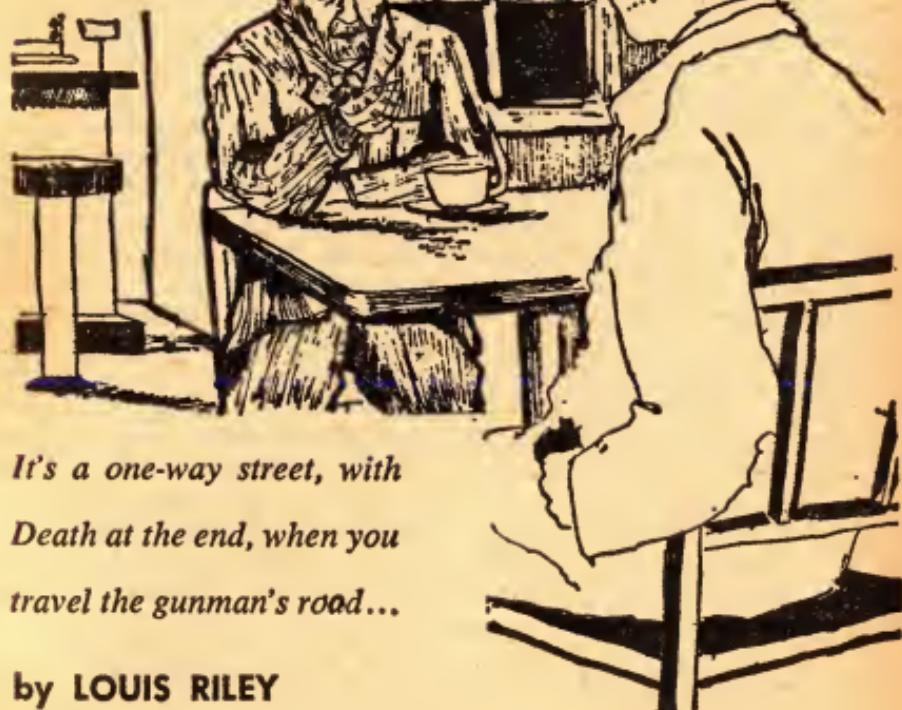
"Bland, overcooked, soggy steam-table servings day after day after day."

"No!"

The doughy-white face fell forward onto the table. The stricken man continued staring at the speaker.

"Cheer up, Mr. Thornton," Cory went on. "You'll surely lose weight on those tasteless, limited meals. You might even live on and be chewing away and swallowing down that repulsive prison food for ten or twenty or more years before you die."

The Old Pro



*It's a one-way street, with
Death at the end, when you
travel the gunman's road...*

by LOUIS RILEY

THE KID STOOD huddled in the shallow doorway, barely sheltered from the cold night rain. Across the wet street lay the all-night diner he intended to rob. As

soon as the time was ripe—as soon as he could muster enough courage.

If that damn bum in there would only leave! He'd been sit-

ting in there now for over forty minutes, killing time over one lousy cup of coffee. Obviously the man was homeless and was trying to stay warm and dry. If the old fool only knew what was about to happen he would get out fast enough.

The clock in the grease-stained, rain-lashed window of the hamburger joint read four in the morning. Down the deserted street the corner light glowed dimly in the murky darkness. The pavement in front of the little restaurant reflected the red neon sign above it.

The kid nervously fingered the butt of the pistol in his coat pocket. He was beginning to feel the cold now. Damn the old tramp! Why in the hell don't he leave?

There hadn't been another customer in there for over half an hour. If the bum would leave, the counter man would be by himself. That would be the time to strike.

In the distance a car approached, its headlights stabbing through the plunging rain. It came nearer rapidly, and even now was stopping in front of the diner. A police car!

The kid hunched back into the doorway as one cop got out and sprinted for the cafe. The driver snapped a match in the night and lit a cigarette. He exhaled the smoke and stared moodily ahead through the windshield, where the wipers droned endlessly back and forth like a metronome.

The kid cursed softly. He could hear the police dispatcher's voice crackling incoherently in the soggy darkness. He scrunched closer against the wall.

Peering across the street, he could barely discern the figures through the steamed glass of the dinette. The cop inside had said something to the counter man and was now over at the table where the bum was sitting. He stood over the old man talking.

Now he jerked his thumb to the west, like he was telling the miscreant to get moving. The old man nodded in a vigorous manner and said something back to the cop. Now the policeman nodded in turn, wheeled about and headed for the cigarette machine. He put in some change, pulled a lever and tucked the resulting pack into his jumper. The watching kid had a sudden craving for a smoke, but that was out, right now.

He shifted his gaze to the cop smoking idly in the prowler car. He heard more static from the radio. The cop lifted the mike from its slot and said something into it. Then some metallic instructions came over the air, something about an accident. The cop said something else into the mike, then hung it up. He craned his neck to peer through the window of the cafe and gave a blast on the horn. The sudden sound made the kid start.

The police officer inside picked up a white bag from the counter—

coffee, probably—threw some money down, said something more to the old man as he again jerked his thumb. He stepped out the door, clutching the bag tightly and leaped for the car. The police unit then sped off into the night.

The kid trembled outwardly. Damn the cold! His fingers fondled the solitary quarter in his pocket. He could go over, drink a hot cup of coffee and smoke a cigarette till the bum left. Such an act would do wonders for his nerves. Then he discarded the idea. The hell with it. If he needed something to quell his nerves then he had no business starting out in this kind of life!

The time to stick up the joint was now—while those two cops were busy. Let the tramps fall where they may; if the old man got in his way it would be just too bad.

Looking left and right through the now torrential downpour, he saw that the street was still empty. He stepped from the doorway, coat collar up, right hand gripping the pistol in the pocket, strode into the rain, crossing the street. Might as well get it over with.

He opened the door and stepped into the brightly lit interior. The counter man was in the back somewhere. How in the hell could you hold somebody up that was in the back room?

He stood there uncertainly for a moment, dripping water on the waxed tile of the floor. His heart was thumping. He sensed the old

man eying him. Where in the hell was that damned cook?

"Hey, kid," said the old man, softly.

The kid whirled and looked at him. He was a seedy appearing man of about sixty-five or seventy. His clothes were shabby and still damp. Tousled gray hair protruded from an old blue hat above startling blue eyes. He had about a three-day growth of stubble on his chin.

"Come here, kid," he rasped. The old man motioned for the boy to come.

The kid looked toward the rear opening where he heard dishes clattering, then moved warily over toward the man. The palm of his hand was sweating where he clutched the gun, still in his pocket.

"What do you want, pop?"

The man reached over, pushed a chair out from the table and motioned for the kid to sit down.

"No."

The man spoke softly up at him in almost a whisper. "You're goin' to stick up the joint, yeah?" It was a statement.

The kid cocked an eye at him and glanced again at the rear of the restaurant. He could hear the rain pounding ceaselessly outside. An ominous roll of thunder reverberated across the heavens. He regarded the man again.

"What do you know about it, pop?"

The man snickered. "I saw you

standin' across the street for almost an hour."

The boy looked out the steamed window. He could make out the doorway he'd been slouching in.

"That don't mean anything," said the kid. "I could have been getting out of the rain."

"I know better, kid. I'm an old heister, myself." The man looked around to see if they were still alone. "I just wanted to stick around and see how you worked it."

He coughed, then said, "I can see you're no pro by the way you stood out there so long making up your mind."

The kid rankled. "You better watch your tongue, old man. You might get it shot out of your head."

The man clucked happily. "That's the way to talk, boy! You might make a good one someday." He motioned to the empty chair and said: "Why don't you sit down and let me give you some pointers?" It was more like an order.

The kid grimaced at him. "I don't need pointers from you. You don't look like you were so hot."

"Thats true," said the man. "But I can give you some ideas, and maybe you can benefit by some of my mistakes." He pointed again at the chair. "Go ahead. Sit down kid."

The boys knees were shaking so bad he had to sit down to control them.

"Okay, pop," he said. "Suppose

you give me some of your valuable 'pointers', as you call them."

The old man chuckled. "In the first place, you have no disguise of any kind. Anybody could put the finger on you."

"I don't plan on staying around after I get this money," the kid said. "I need it to get out of town, go to a bigger city."

"Sure, sure. But you should never leave open ends. I left some and look what it got me."

"What did it get you, old man?"

The man looked around again and leaned closer to the boy. "Let me put it this way, kid. You know where the state penitentiary is, about a mile out of town?"

"Yeah. I know where it is."

"Well, I put altogether better than thirty years behind those walls, kid. Thirty years. Just for leavin' a few loose ends around. If I'd been smart, I would have never seen the inside of the joint."

The kid looked at him. "Thirty years? Just for one holdup?" He sounded incredulous.

"No, kid. I didn't do it all in one stretch. It was six different terms they put me in there. I finally had to quit. The next time they would have thrown the book at me, give me the bitch."

"The what?"

"The bitch. That's slang for when they send you up as a habitual criminal. Man, there's no way in the world that you can get out after they hit you with that one."

The counter man came from the rear and looked over at the two curiously. The old man waved at him and said: "Bring us a couple of coffees, Red."

The reedlike cook, with equally thin red hair, eyed them quizzically for a moment, then drew two cups of coffee from the huge urn. He brought the steaming mugs over to the table, along with sugar and cream, while the kid eyed him coldly.

"I don't usually give table service," said Red, "but you guys look pretty wet and tired. Besides, you'd just be slopping up the floor by walking over to the counter."

"Very funny," said the old man. He sneered at Red's retreating back.

Another rumble of thunder resounded overhead.

"Nasty night out," said the man.

"Yeah," the kid agreed. He stirred cream and sugar into his cup. Fishing around in his shirt pocket, he came out with a crumpled pack of cigarettes and set fire to one. He inhaled the smoke gratefully, then expelled a stream of it over the old man's head.

The man stirred his coffee idly for a moment as if contemplating some deeply profound problem. In the silence the rain drummed on, spent water streamed down the window of the cafe, and the clattering of dishes resumed in the rear of the place.



Finally the old man said: "Now, let's see. Where was I?"

"You were talking about getting the bitch," said the kid. He took another drag on his cigarette.

"Yeah." The man took a sip of his steaming coffee and clucked his lips appreciatively. Then: "I knew a lot of guys up there in that pen, kid. Some of the best in the business. Sooner or later, I got to know them all. Being in the same line of work, our paths were bound to cross at one time or another. Did you ever hear of Cuddy Wellston?"

"Yeah," said the kid. "He was that tough bank robber they gassed a couple of years ago."

"You're right," the man said. "The papers said he was a tough one, sure enough. I knew him on the outside and I knew him on the inside. He never really killed anybody, but he was in on a robbery where somebody got shot and killed. He was considered responsi-

ble and so he got the death penalty. The ironic part about it, though, was the fact that the guy that got scragged was in on the holdup too."

The man glanced around once more, and then winked confidentially at the kid. He said: "But he wasn't as tough as the newspapers made him out to be. In the end, when they carried him to the gas chamber, he blubbered like a kid. Wanting his mother, and all, you know. By the way—how old are you, boy?"

"Seventeen."

"That's a good age. That's how old I was when I started out. Only I was unlucky. I started out with this penny-ante stuff myself. By the time I was eighteen I'd made myself about two hundred dollars and five years over there in that pen. I figured that time out of my life netted me about four dollars a month. And then I had to use that money for some shyster lawyers that didn't know a courtroom from a bar stool. But maybe I was kind of lucky, at that. I could have got a tenner thrown at me."

The kid shook his head in uncertain sympathy.

"That was a tough break," he said.

"Yeah," the old man rasped. "But that's all in the past. Maybe you'll have better luck than me, although I doubt it. When I started out they didn't have near the communications system they got today,

to say nothing of the criminal identification bureau. Nowadays, as soon as they know who you are they got you pegged for the rest of your life. It's just a small matter of time before somebody spots you and you are picked up and hauled off. In this day and age, they even know if you change your brand of toilet paper."

The man took another swig of coffee while the kid snuffed out his cigarette in the ash tray on the table.

"Your first stretch in the pen," the man continued, "will be your toughest. All the old cons in there will be fighting over you because you are a new fish. They try to make girls out of boys up there, and you'll find yourself fighting for your life in order to prove to them that you're a man.

"Then you'll have to do time in the hole for fighting. But the next time you're in, the old cons will know enough to leave you alone. In fact, you might even find yourself battling with them over some new fish just out of quarantine."

The kid shifted uncomfortably. "You sure know a lot about the penitentiary."

"I ought to, boy. Like I say, I spent thirty years of my life up there. The joint is chuck full of guys that ain't man enough to make it on the outside, myself included, I suppose. Somewhere along the line they made their first mistake and then couldn't stop.

And also, you'd be surprised at the amount of guys who are up there for stealing less than two hundred dollars."

The old man took another sip of coffee, then continued: "Of course, you might make it. You might never see the inside of those walls. But the odds are that you will get inside sooner or later. That is, if you don't get yourself killed first."

Another rolling of thunder sounded, this time, off in the distance. The old man cocked an ear to it.

"Sounds like she might be movin' off," he said.

"Huh?" The kid had been lost in his thoughts.

"I said," repeated the old man, "I think the storm is movin' on."

"Oh, yeah," said the kid, uninterested in the elements. "Tell me some more about the pen, pop."

And so it was that the old man talked while the boy listened. As he warmed to his subject it was apparent that he thoroughly knew that of which he spoke, and it was not an attractive picture he was drawing. He had undoubtedly spent thirty years of his life behind those walls, as he claimed.

He knew every thief and murderer by name and seemed proud, yet somewhat humbled by that knowledge. He coursed through the years in a half hour, what it took those men interminable and monotonous months to accomplish.

Yes, he knew that of which he spoke, and he had a very good reason for knowing it. He had been there a long time, himself.

Finally, he said to the kid: "Say, boy, how come you to decide on a life of crime? Trouble at home?"

"You might call it that," said the youngster. "It's my stepfather. Him and mom are always arguing. Especially, when he's drunk. He's always raising hell around the house and Mom raises hell right back at him. They fight a lot about me, but it's a losing battle, I think for Mom. So finally, I just took his gun and beat it."

A twinkle appeared in the old man's bright blue eyes.

"That's exactly what happened to me," he said. "I had an overbearing stepfather and decided to leave home too. But I'll admit now that it was the worst mistake I ever made in my life."

The kid looked concerned. "You mean because you had to do all that time?"

The man's eyes saddened, now. "No, son, not that. I don't worry about the time I did. That's all water under the bridge. What bothers me is that I walked out on my mother when she needed me most. After I left, she was there alone with her husband. She needed me around, if for nothing else but moral support.

"But I was a young hothead and didn't give a damn. Ran off anyhow. It broke her up. She never

was the same again. Never really had nothing left to live for. Now that it's too late, I realize just how wrong I was. That was my first real chance to face up to the world and be a man by sticking home when I was needed most. But I blew it.

"I couldn't see it at the time, but when I was doing my first stretch I found I had plenty of time to meditate. When I got out, it was too late. She'd already died."

The old man lapsed off into a reminiscent silence.

The kid gazed unseeingly into his empty coffee cup, thinking.

Outside now, the rain had finally stopped and the first glints of the morning sun appeared. The late spring sky was brightening rapidly.

The old man suddenly came to. He looked out the window.

"Well," he said, stretching his arms. "Looks like it's going to be a good day after all. The sun's going to be out to warm and dry everything up. I'd better get going before that cop comes back and vags me. I'd hate to be locked up on a day like this. Yeah, kid. I think it's going to be a beautiful day."

He put twenty cents on the table. "That's for the coffee, kid. Thanks for listening to an old man chatter about a wasted and useless life." He got up to leave. "If you ever get up to the pen, tell the boys I'm thinking about them."

The kid stared at him vacantly for a moment, his mind ill at ease. He appeared to be experiencing an

internal struggle. Then with a snap of his fingers, he erased the conflicts inside. He stood up also.

"Forget it, pop," he said. "And forget about me saying hello to your old cronies. I'm not going to any state pen. I'm going home and stay with my old lady. Like you say, she needs me now. I'll finish school and get me a part time job while I'm finishing it." The kid looked around, smiling for the first time. "Maybe I'll even get me a job in this restaurant, here."

The man clapped the youth on the shoulder and nodded vigorously. "Now you're talkin' boy! You don't want to wind up like me. You're too fine a lookin' lad."

They went out the door together and silently shook hands. They went their separate ways.

A few minutes later the pay phone rang in the little cafe. Red, the counter man answered.

"Hello? Oh, hi, Babe. No, it was a quiet night. Too much rain, I guess. Just old Bill Johnson sitting in here with some kid for a while. His car broke down west of town as he was coming in from a three day fishing trip. He had a policeman go rout out a mechanic and take it to the garage. Sure does a lot of fishing, that guy. Ever since he retired from being warden of the state penitentiary, he—Huh? Oh, yeah. I'll bring it home later, when—"

Outside, the sun was shining brightly, now.

MR. WONG and the FATAL PHOBIA

*Who killed Flora Hobson?
only a secret killer knew—
and a certain Mr. Wong . . .*

by DAN ROSS



A New MR. WONG and INSPECTOR BANNERJEE Story

IT WAS A foggy, wet night as art dealer Mei Wong waited in the entrance of Bombay's Empire Hotel for the expected police car bearing his friend Inspector Bannerjee of the homicide division. His broad face wore a look of perplexity as he considered the facts given him by the inspector in a hurried telephone conversation.

"Flora Hobson just committed suicide," the inspector had informed him. "I'm going to her place now. I know she and her nephew were close friends of yours. I thought you might like to come along."

So now he was waiting for the in-

spector, ready to make this rather unpleasant visit. He couldn't picture resolute, dominant Flora Hobson as a suicide. Yet it was possible. She did have one odd weakness. The wealthy old woman suffered from nyclophobia, a fear of darkness. He had heard many stories about this.

A sleek black sedan pulled up at the curb outside the hotel and the tall figure of Inspector Bannerjee jumped out lightly. Mei Wong, short and stout in contrast to his friend, padded quickly out into the drizzle of the street to meet him.

Inspector Bannerjee's bearded face showed gratitude as he

opened the rear door of the waiting sedan for him.

"Glad you came along," he said.

Mei Wong nodded, got into the car. The driver headed the vehicle out into traffic again.

As they drove toward the home of the late Flora Hobson the inspector said: "What do you suppose made her do it?"

Mei Wong shrugged his broad shoulders. "I can't imagine. Only last week she bought a valuable painting from me. Her nephew came and picked it up."

The inspector nodded. "That would be Walter Carraway. He's lived with her for some time. Did you also know that his half-brother Peter has been staying there for a few weeks as well?"

The art dealer showed astonishment. "I don't think I have ever heard of him."

"Sort of a roamer," the inspector said. "This is his first visit to India. I understand he was a seaman on a tramp ship. Injured his left leg while in port here and his aunt insisted he stay with her. You'll meet him tonight."

Within a few minutes they were driving in the palm-ringed roadway leading to the Hobson mansion. A servant let them in and directed them to the luxurious living room, where they found both Walter Carraway and his half-brother, Peter.

Walter, a thin blonde man in his thirties, came forward with an outstretched hand to greet them.

"Sorry to give you so much trouble, Inspector." And then he nodded to Mei Wong. "Good of you to come as well."

After greetings had been exchanged, Walter Carraway turned and introduced them to his half-brother, who rose with some difficulty from the easy chair in which he'd been sitting and hobbled over, leaning heavily on a cane to greet them. He was a quiet, dark-haired man perhaps a few years younger than Walter but with a weather-beaten face that reflected his years at sea.

Then Walter took over again: "I don't know exactly what happened to Aunt Flora. She's been rather strange lately. From all appearances she deliberately threw herself over the small balcony outside her room. She was alone at the time. Peter was here in the living room and I was in my own room. A servant heard her cry out and the crash of her body on the asphalt drive."

He shook his head. "A very sad business, believe me!"

After the inspector had checked the remains and the spot where the body had been found, they went upstairs to Flora Hobson's bedroom. It was large and very ornately furnished, containing many of the Chinese art objects Mei Wong had sold her over the years. His eyes wandered sadly from a pair of crimson tapestries with yellow dragons to a large porcelain

vase on the dresser. So many familiar items!

Both Walter Carraway and his half-brother had made the journey upstairs and now stood in the room with Bannerjee and Mei Wong. It had been a particularly difficult ascent for Peter with his injured left leg. Now he stood leaning heavily on his cane.

"Of course you both must have heard my aunt suffered from nyctophobia, an insane fear of the dark," Walter said. "She rarely left this room after nightfall and the lights in here were never turned off. When a bulb burned out it was replaced at once. And as you may notice there is no way to turn off the power. The current that feeds this room is on one switchless circuit."

Mei Wong's eyes had wandered to the one modern touch in the big bedroom, an electric mantel clock. He said: "There was no power failure in this district tonight, was there?"

Walter Carraway looked bewildered. "Why do you ask that?"

The old art dealer studied him with shrewd eyes. "I wondered if perhaps your aunt might not have been subjected to a temporary period of darkness and in her fear ran out to the balcony and toppled accidentally to her death."

"There was no power failure," Walter Carraway said. "You agree, Peter?"

The dark haired half-brother

nodded affirmation. "The lights never wavered all night."

Mei Wong turned to Inspector Bannerjee: "Then I fear Mrs. Hobson was murdered."

Inspector Bannerjee's expression became stern. "What makes you think so, Mr. Wong?"

"I still feel sure Mrs. Hobson's flight from this room was caused by her fear of darkness. I would assume someone deliberately saw that the lights went out here for a period." He looked at the nephew. "In fact I am positive the lights were off for a short time."

"How can you be positive?" Walter Carraway asked.

Mei Wong waved a pudgy hand toward the mantel clock. "It is indicated by the device on the clock face. The red dot there plainly indicates there was a break in the current. It goes on when the power goes off."

The blonde man studied the clock and a look of amazement crossed his face.

"You're right!" he exclaimed. "But who could have done it?"

Inspector Bannerjee sighed.

"I imagine we'll soon find that out," he said. "Where's the switchboard controlling the house fuses?"

"Downstairs," Walter Carraway told him. "In the utility room leading off the kitchen."

They all moved toward the door except Peter Carraway, who stood staring at the clock with a troubled expression. Leaning heavily on the

cane with which he eased his injured left leg, he turned to them with a sigh. "Why would anyone want to do this to Aunt Flora?"

Inspector Bannerjee's tone held sarcasm as he answered: "Generally these crimes are committed for profit."

And turning to Walter Carraway he said: "Have you any idea who your aunt's heirs might be?"

The blonde man looked pale. "She had only myself and Peter. But you're surely not suggesting either of us did this dreadful thing?"

"I'm not suggesting anything," the inspector said. "Can the fuse board be reached from outside the house?"

"Quite easily," Walter said. "There's a path to the back of the house through the garden."

Mei Wong was with Inspector Bannerjee when, with the aid of a flashlight, he traced the footprints from the main entrance of the house that led directly to the door of the room with the fuse box.

The prints were only fairly clear in spite of the soft, damp ground. But one feature of them was unmistakable—the mark of a cane at regular intervals beside them.

Inspector Bannerjee looked at Mei Wong with a sober face. "I'd say there was no doubt who tampered with the fuse and caused Flora Hobson's death."

Mei Wong nodded.

"No doubt at all," he agreed.

A few minutes later they faced

the two nephews in the living room again. Both the young men waited expectantly to hear what they'd discovered.

"Have you found anything of help?" Walter asked.

"Yes," the inspector said. "We know who caused your aunt's death." And he gazed sternly at the man in the chair. "We found footprints leading to the fuse box. And cane marks beside the footprints."

"But I didn't do it!" Peter Carraway protested as he used the cane in his left hand to rise with difficulty.

Now it was Mei Wong's turn to speak. The stout art dealer took a step toward the dark young man. "Please do not distress yourself unnecessarily. I'm prepared to back up your statement. You are indeed not guilty."

It was Inspector Bannerjee's turn to show surprise. "How do you figure that, Wong?"

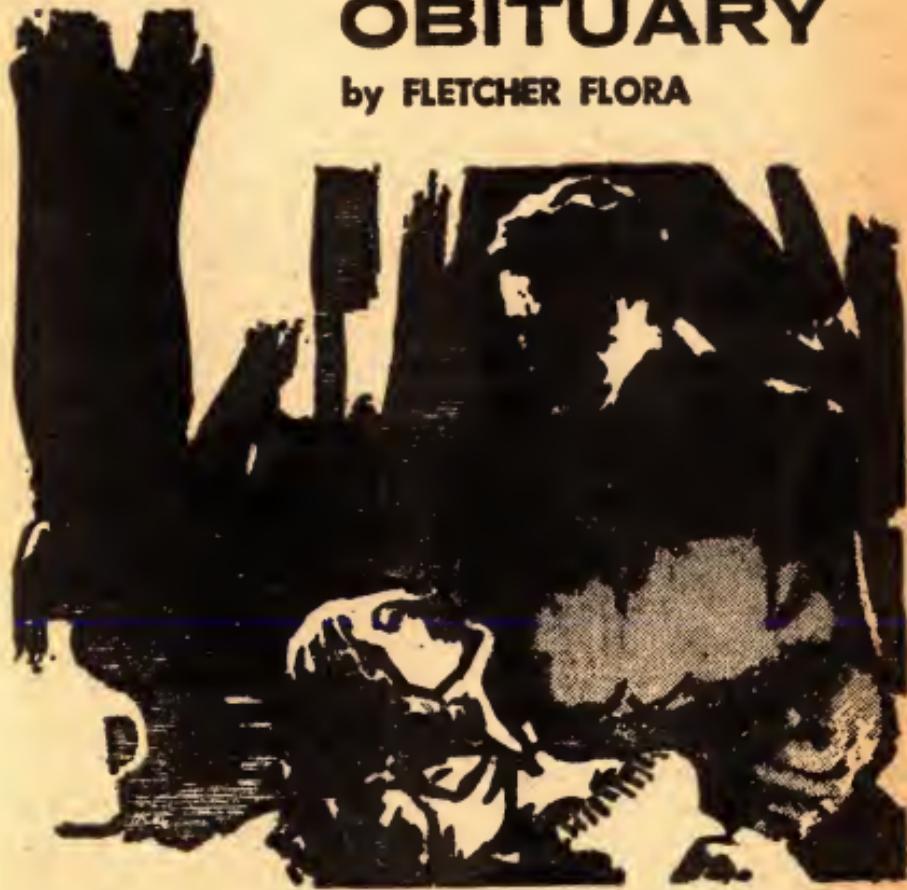
"By the cane marks," Mei Wong said calmly. "I took particular notice. They were on the right side of the footprints. Whoever tried to put the guilt on Peter Carraway's shoulders had an excellent idea, but in his hurry to carry it out he forgot that he carried his cane in his left hand."

Wong looked at a pale Walter Carraway. "Since only one other person had anything to gain by what happened, I do not think you will have much difficulty deciding on the impersonator."

*She was too old to love, too young and healthy to die.
But he could still teach her one last little game—Murder!*

OBITUARY

by FLETCHER FLORA



MR. CAMERON FLEMING belonged to another age. In a time of sprawling urban growth, two-car garages and super-markets, he remained what he had al-

ways been, and what his father had been before him. He was, in brief, the sole and independent proprietor of a neighborhood grocery.

As a boy in better days, when his father had kept the store, he had fallen under the spell generated by that special and seductive mixture of scents peculiar to places where foods were gathered in the bulk, in barrels and boxes and jars and wooden tubs, and he had never escaped the spell.

It is true that the enchanting odor was gone now, or greatly diminished, but it was not gone from the memory of Cameron Fleming. In a mute and simple way, Cameron was a poet, and he had the poet's capacity for intense recollection.

As everyone has realized at one time or another, there is nothing so tenacious as a remembered odor, nothing so calculated to bring back by association all the objects and events and emotions connected with it.

And that's how it was with Cameron Fleming.

Every morning, when he unlocked the front door of his store and entered from the street, he could actually smell the magic effluvium of yesterday as surely as if the pickle barrel still stood, the tub of peanut butter still leaked the oily scent of goobers, and the hanging stalk of bananas still trailed a spoor of golden tropical fruit.

It was relatively late when Cameron married Millicent Hooker. He was, to be exact, thirty-two at the time. The marriage was hardly a

success, but neither was it a disaster. It was merely dull.

Cameron was not greatly upset by the barrenness of his domestic life. He had the store, and the store was enough. For a time, that is. Until, to give a beginning to his decline, the day that Mrs. Hardy came in for a pound of round steak and a dime's worth of onions.

Caroline Hardy was about Cameron's age, about forty, but she was, so to speak, much older and younger at the same time. She had married young and lived hard and buried her husband, who had died at the age of thirty-eight, and she was tired. She did not, however, look tired. Neither did she look forty. She looked maybe thirty-five or thirty, depending upon the time of day and the degree of light and sometimes the character of the night before.

She was not actually pretty, and probably had never been, but she had magnetism and flair; even the simple gingham dress that she wore into the store was somehow, on her, like a party frock.

Cameron Fleming, approaching her, felt suddenly wistful, as if he had, after all, missed more in his life than he had known.

"Good afternoon," he said. "May I help you?"

"I'd like a pound of round steak, please," she said.

Behind the meat counter, he cut the steak and weighed it and

wrapped it. Portent of the future, passing unnoticed, he gave her a pound and a quarter.

"Will there be anything else?"

"One large onion, please."

"I'm afraid the onions aren't large today. Two or three smaller ones, perhaps?"

"Two should be sufficient."

He selected two, the largest he had, and put them on the scales. They weighed out at twelve cents.

"That will be a dime," he said, blowing his profit.

With her purchases in hand, she seemed loathe to leave. She looked slowly around her, and her pink lips formed the smile for which they were always prepared.

"What a perfectly charming store," she said.

"Thank you," he said. "It's been in the family for years. My father ran it before me."

"So much better, I think, than these great cold barns that pass for markets nowadays."

"I've never had the pleasure of waiting on you before, have I?"

"No. This is the first time, but I assure you it won't be the last."

"I hope not. I sincerely do. Are you new in the neighborhood?"

"I moved into the house at the other end of the block just two days ago."

"If you'd care to open a charge account, I'd be glad to accommodate you."

"I'll think about it. It might be convenient. My husband is dead,

and I must work for my living. That's why I moved here. Starting Monday, I have a job as file clerk at the cement plant."

"I'm sure an account would work out satisfactorily for both of us."

"You're very kind. Anyhow, I shall certainly come again. My name, incidentally, is Mrs. Hardy. Caroline Hardy."

"Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Hardy. I'm Cameron Fleming."

She smiled again and nodded briskly.

"Well, I must get back. I'm really not quite settled yet. Good-by, Mr. Fleming."

That was on Thursday. On Saturday she returned to open an account and buy a week's supply of groceries.

Although she arrived at a time when trade was slack, the store being empty of other customers, their second encounter lacked, nevertheless, the delicious intimacy of the first. This was due to the presence of Jimmy Cobb, an explosion of red hair and freckles that Cameron employed as a part-time assistant for fifty cents an hour. His presence this day did not actually hamper Cameron's actions in any way, for they would have been totally innocent in any event, but he managed, just by being there, to take the fine edge off things.

In the end, however, Jimmy proved himself useful, for Cameron ordered him home with Mrs.

Hardy to carry the two large sacks of groceries that she bought.

Like all merchants, Cameron delighted in making large sales, but it must be said that his delight on this occasion was qualified by regret. Mrs. Hardy having bought for the week, it followed that it would be that long before he would see her again. The thought depressed him, but soon he was whistling softly as he went about his work.

It was entirely possible, after all, that Mrs. Hardy had forgotten some necessary staple and would have to return for it during the coming week. In Cameron's experience, women were always remembering the cakes and caviar and completely forgetting the sugar and salt.

And so, indeed, it turned out. Wednesday afternoon, about five-thirty, the telephone rang, and Cameron answered with the routine phrase.

"Fleming's Grocery."

"This is Caroline Hardy, Mr. Fleming."

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Hardy. What can I do for you?"

"Is Jimmy Cobb there?"

"Yes, Jimmy's here."

"Well, I'm in the middle of baking, and I discover that I have no baking powder. I wonder if you could have Jimmy run right up with a can?"

"Certainly. Right away, Mrs. Hardy."

"It's very accommodating of you."

Cameron's accommodation did not end with his agreement to send the baking powder. Leaving Jimmy to mind the store, a rare occurrence, he gave the delivery his personal attention. Three minutes later, having walked up the block by way of the alley, he was approaching Mrs. Hardy's back door.

Mrs. Hardy, in the kitchen, was at once domestic and alluring in stretch pants protected by a bright patch of apron. Millicent, thought Cameron sadly, never wore stretch pants in the kitchen or elsewhere, and if she had the effect would hardly have been comparable.

"Why, Mr. Fleming!" Mrs. Hardy said. "How kind of you to come yourself. I've put you to no end of trouble."

"Nothing of the sort," Cameron said. "Jimmy was busy, and I thought the walk would do me good."

"Well, you must stay and rest a moment. May I offer you something? Coffee? A glass of sherry?"

Strangely exhilarated, shedding restraint with a sense of daring, Cameron accepted sherry. The sherry, poured from a bottle taken from a kitchen cabinet, was of cooking quality, but, being no connoisseur of wines, he did not know the difference.

Mrs. Hardy had a glass with him as a convivial gesture, and he was astonished, consulting his

watch on the return trip down the alley, to discover that he had lingered in the kitchen a full ten minutes. In the store, under the completely innocent observation of Jimmy Cobb, he had a delicious sense of guilt, as if he had just come hot and smoking from an assignation.

Gradually thereafter, over a period of several months, his relationship with Caroline Hardy took on the aspects of discreet infidelity—a thoroughly chaste affair. As time passed it seemed that Mrs. Hardy found it necessary more and more often to call for emergency deliveries, and by some odd trick of circumstances they invariably came just when Cameron was feeling that a short walk would do him good. The quality of the sherry did not improve, but the consumption of it materially increased.

Cameron could not remember later just when titles and surnames were abandoned. They simply became to each other, at some point in the lapse of time, Caroline and Cameron. And it became apparent, even to a man as modest as he, that she responded to his unexpressed feelings with an emotion equally intense, although equally mute.

He could hardly believe his incredible good luck. It seemed impossible that she could actually be attracted to such a dull fellow, and he began to wonder, examining his reflection in the glass door

of his refrigerator, if he was such a dull fellow after all.

Without ever touching each other, they became lovers. At least they did in the mind of Cameron Fleming. He took her tenderly in a dozen repeated dreams, and it was only a small step from there to the bitter wish that he were free to take her in fact. Perhaps he



would have been if he had tried, but he was deterred by his natural timidity and the conviction that she would be amenable to seduction only if it were not extramarital.

Having no grounds for divorce, and no hope of it, he was forced to find his freedom, as he took his love, only in fantasy.

But divorce is merely one way to lose a wife. There are other ways, and death is one of them. The death of Millicent began to share his dreams with the love of Caroline, the former being in his judgment a prerequisite to the latter. Millicent, of course, showed no signs whatever of dying, but natural dying is merely one kind of death.

There are other kinds, and mur-

der is one of them. The murder of Millicent began to replace in his dreams the natural death of Millicent, the former being in his judgment the only reasonable alternative to the latter.

It was Caroline herself who gave urgency to his dream. She had come into the store quite late, just before closing time, and had asked for a can of peas. He had squatted down before the bottom shelf on which the canned peas were stocked and had asked her choice of brands. She had squatted beside him to see for herself what choice there was, and suddenly, side by side on their haunches and touching each other with only their lips, they were kissing.

After a while, she stood up and sighed and smoothed her skirt over her hips with her hands.

"I'm sorry," she said. "We shouldn't have done that."

"Why not?" he said, rising beside her.

"Because it was wrong."

"Why was it wrong?"

"Because you're married."

"I wish I weren't."

"If you want to know the truth," she said, "so do I."

But if it was she who thus gave his dream urgency, it was chance that gave it purpose and direction. As if he were simply playing a deadly game to amuse himself, he began to think of all the ways a woman could be made to die, and the game was made immensely

more difficult, of course, by the fact that the death, however contrived, must be made to appear either natural or accidental.

One afternoon in his store he was stocking a shelf with bottles of a common household bleach. In the process, his attention was caught by a few words of warning on the label. In brief, the user was cautioned not to mix the bleach with ammonia or any toilet bowl cleaner. Doing so, according to the warning, would release hazardous gases which might be fatal.

Cameron stood still as stone in his enchanted place, remembering an article he had read in some publication for consumers or dealers in which this danger had been developed, spelled out in detail and supported by reference to several fatal accidents. One could not, of course, be absolutely assured that it would kill in every instance.

On the other hand, if the effects were not fatal, the instance could be passed off as accidental and nothing lost but the chance. Cameron had just reached that point in his thinking when he was interrupted by a customer. He put the bottle of bleach on the shelf and went to wait on the customer, but when he left for home that evening, he carried the bottle with him.

On Friday morning, two days later, as was their habit, he and Millicent wakened and rose together to the strident summons of their alarm clock. Adhering to routine,

she went first into the bathroom, for this arrangement gave her time, while he himself executed the essential small functions dictated by hygiene and biology, to brew his coffee and poach his egg and toast his bread.

While he waited for her, he listened rather sadly to her activities behind the closed door. He heard the water-closet empty and fill. He heard water running into the lavatory. After a flurry of splashing, he heard the brisk, bristly sound of the brushing of teeth. Then she came out, wrapped in a robe, and went directly to the kitchen.

It was indicative of their status that they did not speak all this while, and his feeling of vague sadness persisted. If he regretted what he was going to do, or attempt to do, it was not because of what she was, but because of what she had failed to be.

In the bathroom, after hurrying through what was necessary to prepare himself for the day, he took the bottle of bleach from the linen closet, where he had tucked it away the night before, and poured it all, a full quart, into the small amount of water at the bottom of the toilet bowl. The harsh odor of the bleach pervaded the small room, but he was reasonably certain that it would incite Millicent to no more than a sour resentment toward him for creating it.

After all, a woman would hardly recognize a danger signal when

she was completely unaware of being in danger. He wondered if Millicent was even aware of the deadly reaction set off by chlorine bleach and any acid-producing substance, such as a toilet bowl cleaner, and he doubted it. Like many housewives, she rarely read labels.

Anyhow, it was done. It was done, so far, so simply. Of course, the crucial part remained. It was necessary now to make certain that Millicent cleaned this morning, but he was already fairly certain that she would. She did her housework on schedule, as he had learned in the years of their marriage, and he knew that this was the morning for the bathroom. It was for this reason, to exploit the schedule, that he had waited the two days after bringing the bleach home.

In the kitchen, he sat down to his egg and toast and coffee. "What are you going to do this morning?" he said.

"Housework, as usual," she said. "What else is there?"

"This is your morning for the bathroom, isn't it?"

"It is. Why?"

"I noticed that the toilet bowl is a bit stained. It needs cleaning."

"Well, don't let it disturb you. I'll get to it as soon as you're out of the way."

"Of course, dear. I didn't mean to complain."

At the front door, he received

the habitual peck on the cheek that always seemed to convey more animosity than affection. He walked the three blocks to his store, and it was then, for him, the beginning of a long, long day. There were so many things that could go wrong, and all of them plagued his mind as the long day dragged by.

What if Millicent staged a petty domestic rebellion and refused to clean the bathroom at all? Not likely, and if she did he could always try again. What if she flushed the bowl before adding the cleaner? The answer as before: he could try again. What if the gases were not fatal? A possibility, certainly, but the possibility was just as good that they would be. Fatal or not, the incident would surely pass as an accident. Failure in this event would make it impossible, of course, to try the same method again, but there were other methods, and there would be other chances.

At noon he made himself a bologna sandwich and drank a pint of milk. At four Jimmy Cobb came in and began delivering the neighborhood orders that had accumulated during the day. Caroline Hardy did not come or call, and for once Cameron was glad that she didn't. When next he saw her, he hoped that it would be with the expanded vision and prospects of a free agent.

At six, he locked the store and walked home. At six-five, his

hopes neatly realized, he found Millicent dead just inside the bathroom door.

He summoned the family physician at once, who came and pronounced her dead and summoned the police, as required in such cases. The police, in the person of a detective, called the coroner, who delivered, for lack of anything constructive to do, a bitter little lecture on the incredible stupidity of the average housewife.

All the evidence of death by misadventure was present. There was the can of cleaner, lying where it had fallen, a few crystals spilled out from its lip upon the floor. There was the bottle that had contained the bleach. There was the fallen brush on the floor beside the cleaner. There, finally was the bereaved husband, roundly berating himself for having never warned his wife against the deadly danger of bleach and cleaners mixed.

"Millicent never read labels," he said dully. "I could never teach her to read labels."

Thereafter, he was too busily engaged to permit the intrusion of fears, real or imaginative, or the grim indictment of his conscious. There were relatives to notify. There were arrangements to make with a local undertaker. There were insurance agents to see. There were callers to receive, expressions of condolence to acknowledge.

Later, there were relatives in

the house, and at last, on the following Monday, the funeral itself. It was not until Monday evening that he was really left alone to assess his feelings.

Somehow, he did not feel as elated as the success of his venture warranted. Not even the vision of Caroline Hardy, now invoked, was enough to lift his spirits. Perhaps it was because he was so tired. Perhaps he would have to survive a period of adjustment—of convalescence, so to speak. Suddenly he was intensely eager for tomorrow to come. Suddenly he longed in anguished loneliness for the sweet-smelling sanctuary of his enchanted store.

The longing could not be denied. Leaving the house, he walked in darkness to the store and let himself in. A small night light was burning at the rear.

In the shadows, he found his apron and put it on and stood behind the counter as if he waited for a nocturnal customer. He stood there for a long time, and he was aware that it was not the same, that something was lacking, and then he realized that he could smell nothing.

The magic odor, recovered daily from the enchanted past, was dissipated, gone, lost forever in the acrid stench of chlorine and acid, and lost and gone with it were the thousand and one associations that had sweetened his days for all his years.

What have I done? he thought dully.

And standing alone in bleak sterility, he answered his own question.

I'm dead, he thought. I've killed myself.

The next afternoon, when Jimmy Cobb reported for work and found the store closed, he merely decided that Mr. Fleming was observing a brief period of mourning, and he went quietly away.

It was, in fact, two days before Mr. Fleming was widely missed, and still another day before authority could be prevailed upon to enter the store. Inasmuch as the neighbors had been incited by anxiety to grim expectations, no one was greatly surprised when Mr. Fleming was found dead in his cooler, a tight little death chamber. There was a tin pail on the floor of the cooler.

Beside the pail, empty, were a bottle that had contained bleach and a can that had contained toilet-bowl cleaner.

Mr. Fleming's body, thanks to the low temperature in the cooler, was very well preserved.

It was considered both pitiable and romantic that Mr. Fleming, in his grief, had chosen to die deliberately by the same domestic devil's brew that had killed his wife accidentally. But it must be remembered that Mr. Fleming, being a kind of poet, was given to poetic fancies.

FORGET YOU SAW ME

"Just to remind you, Dad," the voice said. "Cool it with the fuzz—or cool it in your grave!"

by CARL HENRY RATHJEN

GEORGE MANDERS felt older than his thirty-five years as he hopelessly closed the last folio of police mug shots and looked up at Detective Sergeant Wingate.

"The man who tried to kill me is not among any of the phoots you've shown me."

"You're sure of that?" Wingate said, brown eyes glistening.

Manders resented the suspicion.

"Why shouldn't I want you to get him?"

"All right." Wingate extended a pack of cigarettes. Manders shook his head. The detective lit one for himself. "We'll get an artist to work up a composite picture from your description."

Manders stood up. "Okay. I'll drop back this evening or tomorrow. Whenever you're ready."

Wingate's motioning hand left a fluttering trail of cigarette smoke. "No. Mr. Manders. We're holding you."

"You're holding me! What for?"

"You're a material witness. Your testimony is too important for us to risk losing."

Manders was more than resentful now. "That's nonsense. I'm not going to leave town or the state. I'll be around to testify, when you get him and bring him to trial."

"We have no doubts on that score. Mr. Manders, but—"

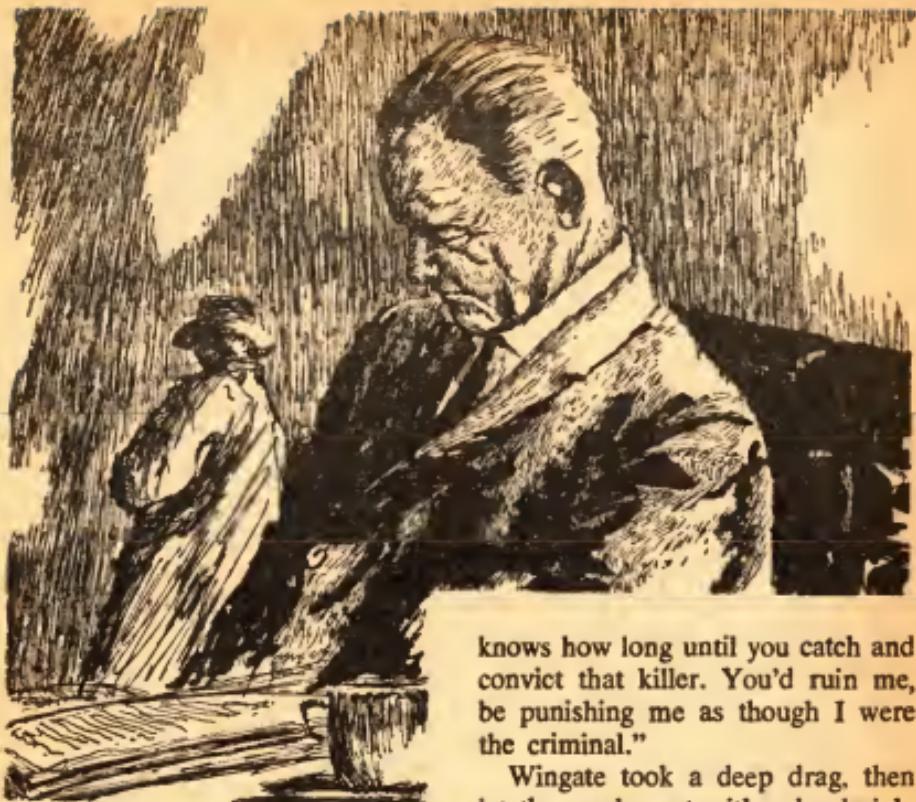
"I've got a living to make, a family to support," Manders protested. "You can't—"

The detective's interrupting words were fat. "We've got a legal right to hold you as a material witness. We realize it possibly imposes a hardship—"

"Possibly?" Manders echoed caustically.

Wingate went right on. "Your job won't be jeopardized. Your employer will have to regard this as similar to jury duty."

"I don't have an employer," Man-



ders snapped. "I'm self-employed. That Volkswagen transporter parked outside is mine. It's my business, all mine. It's outfitted as a mobile bookkeeping office, curb service for small businesses like that liquor store where I went in to solicit his accounting and tax work."

Wingate frowned. "I knew you were an accountant, but I didn't realize the complete set-up. Don't you have someone who can take over for you?"

"No. I'm the whole operation." Manders shook his head. "That's why you can't hold me for God

knows how long until you catch and convict that killer. You'd ruin me, be punishing me as though I were the criminal."

Wingate took a deep drag, then let the smoke out with a hard sigh. "Look at it this way. Mr. Manders. The guy tried to kill you. He threatened you to forget you saw him. That probably means he knows we haven't anything on him in Records, so he's safe to stay around here, except for you. That's why, aside from protecting our ultimate case against him, we've got to hold you for your own protection."

"And to hell with my living and my family!" Manders retorted. "The mortgage on my home, other obligations to be met."

Wingate ground out his cigarette. "There are provisions whereby

it can be arranged for some public assistance to help hold financial things together for you. And as for your family—I figure they're in danger too, Mr. Manders."

That jolted George Manders.

"So," he said bitterly. "you'll hold me safely while they're exposed—"

"No," said Wingate. "If necessary, we'll take them into protective custody too."

"Just like prisoners." Manders flung at him. Then he shook his head. "Sorry. Mr. Wingate. Of course I want them protected too. Hell, what you want to do will rip the guts out of our lives, my income, our home, the kids' schooling. My girl's hoping to graduate from junior high next June. The boy's a sophomore in high school and—"

"Let's see what we can work out," said Wingate. "Let me get us some coffee first."

Waiting, and alone. George Manders was tempted to slip out of the police station. That would only complicate matters. The police would easily pick him up, then really tighten their hold on him. He began to see why citizens were reluctant to become involved. It was too late now to wish he hadn't parked the transporter outside that liquor store.

On a reference from another client, Ramon's Monterey Cafe, he'd gone in and made his pitch to Pat Riordan, the proprietor. No need of toting the books and records to an accountant's office every month

and being without them. Everything right at hand for emergency consultation service if tax or other problems arose in the accounts.

Hearing the door open behind him, he'd stepped aside so Riordan could wait on the customer. Riordan's eyes had narrowed. His hand reached under the counter. Shots blasted. Riordan's nose mashed and splattered, a hand went toward his chest. Whirling, Manders saw the evilly pinched face above and back of the gun centering on himself. The trigger finger worked. The gun clicked. An obscene oath matched the bright fury in the dark eyes, then

"Forget you saw me!" warned the killer. "If you don't—"

The man, about twenty-five, tried once more to shoot Manders. Then he fled. Manders, scarcely believing he was still alive when he'd been so close to death, surprised himself with his calmness, going to the door and calling to startled passersby.

"Watch where that man goes!"

Apparently no one else wished to become involved, for he was the only witness the police found. Maybe he should have played dumb too, shouldn't have informed the police he got a good look at the killer. But then he'd recently told his kids they weren't being good citizens if they failed to tell the police something they might know about a drug problem at school. How could he take the attitude of, "Do as I say, not as I do?"

Wingate placed a paper cup of

coffee in front of him. "Did you want cream and sugar?"

"Black is fine," said Manders. "But first, where's a phone? I'd better alert my wife, tell her to get the kids home."

"We did that long ago," said Wingate.

"Thanks for letting me know right away!" Manders' words rapped out, hard and biting. "What have you been doing? Grilling them, hoping to trip up my story? If I was a suspect, then what the hell did I do with the gun?"

Wingate wasn't in the least embarrassed. "We didn't find it around the liquor store or in your car."

"But you're still going to hold me."

"Just as a material witness, Mr. Manders. Now let's see what we can arrange."

"For you guys. The hell with me and mine."

Wingate frowned. "I'm sorry it looks that way to you. But we've got problems in our work, the same as you have in yours. Do you suppose we could try to understand each other, Mr. Manders?"

An hour later, with a police officer riding the transporter with him, Manders drove past the police car in front of his home. Another police car followed him into the drive. It was a nice two-story house, red brick below the ground floor windows, white siding above. Almost paid for. Getting a little crowded for four people, but in a few years

the kids would be going off on their own. Then it would be just right for the older generation.

Phyllis hurried out from the kitchen door. Usually her round, happy face didn't need much make-up. Now it was too pale despite his telling her on the phone that he was okay.

"Oh, George!" she cried, clinging to him. Plumper than she used to be, but still very nice to hold tightly. Funny he'd never noticed that much gray in her auburn hair before. Could it have mostly come in this afternoon? He eased her back.

"I'm all right, and I'm going to stay that way. Did you phone your brother in Idaho?"

She nodded, blinking. "They'll make room and meet the plane in Boise tonight. George, why can't you come with us until—"

Idaho was out of the state, out of bounds for a material witness, and it might be a long time before this was cleared up. He didn't want to arouse her fears on that score, so he gestured toward the flower beds, the vegetable patch, the grape and berry vines.

"Somebody's got to keep the place watered and weeded. How are the kids taking this?"

"Like teen-agers. Rebelliously. Jack's got baseball and his car. Janet's got—"

Wingate approached in the drive. "I hate to break in, folks, but we haven't got muc htme to get to the

airport. Is everyone packed and ready?"

Phyl turned to him. "Only if I'm sure of your promise that you're going to protect my husband."

"Phyl," Manders remonstrated. "It's all set."

She still looked at Wingate. He nodded. "Your husband will be accompanied in his work. He won't be alone here at night. We'll keep a close watch to prevent every possible—"

"And none of that and more." Phyl declared, "saved President Kennedy, his brother, or Martin Luther King or . . ."

Manders grasped his wife's arm, shook his head, and led her toward the house. He could see the kids waiting just inside the door, their faces a mixture of fright and protest.

At last he saw them all off in a police car. Standing on the front walk he watched until it turned the corner. Wingate stood beside him. A uniformed officer watched in the opposite direction. Neighbors stared from their front lawns or windows. Manders could feel all the eyes.

"She was right, wasn't she?" he said. "I'm a sitting duck."

"Any time you change your mind," Wingate replied, "we can always put you up at the jail or police station. All the comforts of home. Almost all, anyway." He changed the subject as they walked toward the house. "I liked the way you handled your boy and girl. That

was real communication, whether they liked it or not."

"They didn't," Manders said heavily. "And now I'm going to try communicating with you again."

"No, Manders," Wingate said, sighing. "We're not going to permit you to carry a gun."

"Because I'm not a witness in danger. I'm still a suspect."

"We've been over that," Wingate reminded him. "You've been facing up to it real cool, Manders, and I'll admit it, you are in a spot, a dangerous spot—"

"Then why in hell—"

"Suppose you break?" Wingate went on. "Suppose you mistakenly shoot the wrong person?"

"I saw the killer," Manders insisted. "I'll know him if I see him again. I'm not going to shoot at anybody until I actually know—"

"We'll take care of any shooting, if it comes to that."

"Even if I die first."

Manders hurried ahead as he heard his phone ringing.

"Probably for me," Wingate said behind him. "I wanted confirmation about your kids' school records for the Idaho school authorities."

In the hall George Manders nearly tripped over the long extension cord on the phone. His kids had been calling friends, breaking dates, seeking commiseration, but they'd obeyed the admonition not to tell where they were going.

"Hello?" he answered.

"Just to remind you, Dad," the

voice sneered. "Don't make the scene with the fuzz."

Manders put his hand over the mouthpiece and whispered over his shoulder to Wingate.

"It's him! The killer!"

"Keep him talking," Wingate requested, then raced out.

". . . so cool it," the voice warned. There was an abrupt click.

Manders ran to the door. "He's hung up."

Wingate, halfway to a neighbor's house, came back and went straight to the phone.

"I assume we have your permission to have this line tapped."

Manders nodded. "I've got a radiophone in the transporter, too."

"I doubt if he'd call that number," Wingate said. "It would be too easily traced. He probably won't call this one again, either. But we'll tap both, just in case."

When Wingate hung up his eyes had that hard glint again. "I wonder how he knew who you were so he could call you. We've kept your name from the papers and newscasters."

Manders met the scrutiny. "My transporter was parked outside that liquor store. He could have spotted my name on it before or after he entered."

"Maybe," Wingate conceded. "But I'd say he had his mind on other things before and after."

"And," Manders said dryly, "you still regard me as just a material witness?"



"Suspicion is my business," Wingate said with a wan smile. "I'll try not to think out loud any more." He glanced out the window as a car stopped in front and a man in civilian clothes got out. "One quick question which I should have asked you earlier. You got any racial prejudices?"

Manders saw that the six-footer coming up the walk was dark-skinned.

"No, none," he said. "Except at the moment I'm trying not to be prejudiced about police attitudes."

"Thanks," Wingate grinned, then he opened the front door. "Mr. Manders, this is Jim Collier. He's going to stay here tonight."

Manders held out his hand. "Welcome aboard, Mr. Collier."

When they were alone, Collier

asked, "May I look around, Mr. Manders?"

"Help yourself, and you might as well make it George."

"John, here. And let's get the ground rules understood. You don't go to the door, even if it's a neighbor you know. You don't pull up the shades or look out the windows."

Manders nodded to every instruction. A prisoner in his own home.

They made supper, watched TV, played two-handed pinochle. Collier refused anything alcoholic, but told Manders to go ahead. The beer can in Manders' hand spilled when the phone rang sharply. He looked at Collier.

"Go ahead. Answer it, George. We're ready and waiting."

It was one of his daughter's girl friends. Later, tossing in bed, he heard Collier moving quietly when a car stopped in the street. There seemed to be more traffic than usual in the alley behind the house. And once, through the drawn shade, a bright light flashed across the window.

He and Collier were finishing breakfast when the doorbell rang. It was a uniformed officer, Kimenski, come to relieve Collier. Then the phone rang. It was Phyl, calling from Idaho.

"I slept like a baby last night," Manders lied. "I've got the cops doing the dishes and running the vacuum so there won't be a mess when

you come home. How's everything with Al and his family?"

In the kitchen Kimenski had poured himself a cup of coffee and was finishing up the left-over toast. In the yard two officers were checking the transporter for possible tampering.

"No trace of him yet?" Manders asked.

Kimenski shrugged heavy shoulders. "If you ask me, I'd say he's blown town. But the brass thinks different. They've got a drawing of him in the papers and on TV. They are hoping some citizen or fink will come up with something. You ready? Where're we going first? I gotta let 'em know."

He gaped at the interior of the transporter. Work table, volumes of tax and corporation laws, typewriter with oversize carriage, adding machine, comptometer, file cabinets, coffee urn, swivel chair locked to the table while in transit.

"My brother-in-law's got one of these, sleeps four, got a TV too. Colored."

Downtown, in the parking lot of a small furniture store, Kimenski wandered in and out of the transporter. Each time he opened the door a breeze fluttered papers Manders had spread on the table. Next they went to a lingerie and dress shop. Kimenski ogled the display of bras.

"Man traps," he growled. "I made sure my old lady was phony-

ing on me before we got married.
How about you?"

"Never gave it a thought," said Manders.

"Huh?"

Manders got busy with the adding machine. How long did it take the police to catch a killer? Suppose they never caught him? He punched the total key. The figure didn't look right. He tallied again and got a different sum which meant, to play safe, he had to double-check it. To play safe! He sighed, then slapped his hands on papers as Kimenski opened the door again.

Early in the afternoon Kimenski breathed over his shoulder when they were parked outside a TV and appliance repair shop. Manders hinted that the records before them were confidential.

Kimenski, still peering, nodded. "Just tryin' to find out if the guy in my neighborhood gypped me when he fixed the TV. There's a lot of it in that racket, you know."

Manders asked him how much he had paid.

"Sounds normal," Manders remarked, but Kimenski looked unconvinced.

The door opened suddenly. Manders tensed. Kimenski was still behind his shoulder.

"George," called the repairman. "Phone."

They went inside. Manders tried to relax. It was probably that pharmacist out on Forty-Seventh, always making errors in his entries

and then wailing about problems with sales tax office or the narcotics bureau, then he would phone Manders and expect him to drop whatever he was doing and get right over there. How anybody could trust that druggist to correctly make up a prescription!

"Hello?" Manders answered resignedly.

"So you didn't cool it, you son of a bitch! You'll know that comic drawing in the papers didn't get me when I get you."

The line went dead.

When Wingate arrived, Manders apologized. "I should have remembered a client would have called me on the radiophone."

Wingate turned on Kimenski. "And where was your head?"

Kimenski was aggrievedly defensive. "You mean you want every phone call traced?"

"Do you want me to spell it out like a TV commercial?" Wingate retorted. He frowned. "How did that louse know he could reach you here on the phone?"

Here we go again, thought Manders, but he answered anyway.

"This is one of my regular stops. He may have known about it from working in the neighborhood, or he could have driven by and spotted my office. If it's the latter, it probably means he's disguised himself."

"That's for sure," Wingate agreed. "Anyway, he's not laying low, which gives us better odds for getting him."

"If he doesn't get me first," said Manders.

Wingate gave Kimenski a look. "If he gets anybody first, it better be you."

At four o'clock John Collier picked them up downtown to relieve Kimenski. A police car made a meet at Manders' home. Collier and another man checked through the house while Manders waited outside with an officer. Phyl phoned that evening.

"Just like a normal working day," Manders told her. "Stop worrying." He interrupted her questions. "Wingate says the odds are very good. Any time now."

In the morning he was pleased that the uniformed officer was Kimenski. Then he wasn't so sure he preferred the change. Gregory was an older man, a fussy bachelor wanting everything done his way. He backseat drove, suspected every car that came alongside in traffic, nearly lost a couple of accounts for Manders by his officious and suspicious attitude toward clients.

The unnerving day was compounded when Manders arrived home and found a letter in the mailbox along with the junk mail. The envelope contained a single sheet of paper.

Pasted on it was the composite face from the newspapers. Below it was a crude sketch of a man's torso sitting on a gravestone with the name "Manders" and an obscene adjective preceding the word "fink."

Collier had it taken to the police lab.

"I'll get you a beer, George. Or have you got something stronger you'd prefer? Frankly, I'm pleased at this. Soon he'll get too cocky for his own good."

"Phyl didn't phone until late.

"I thought you were going to call me, George," she said.

He'd been so shaken he'd forgotten his promise. "I meant to, Phyl, but we were watching TV and time got away."

"Your voice doesn't sound right. I want the truth, George."

"I'm just tired, Phyl. It was a tough day."

Wingate came in the morning. When Manders asked about finger-prints or other leads from the letter, the detective said he hadn't heard from the lab yet.

"Would you swear to that?" Manders demanded.

Wingates brown eyes met his. "Could you work at the police station if we had books and things picked up and brought there for you?"

Manders felt hollow inside. "It's that bad then."

"We're working," Wingate assured him. "But it doesn't come all neatly packaged. It takes time to put it together."

Manders nodded. "And it might take longer, much longer, if I were taken out of circulation?"

"Vulnerability is more apropos, George," Collier said quietly.

They waited, watching Manders. Finally he pulled up words to break the heavy silence. "I want to get this over with, one way or the other."

There was a light in Wingate's eyes he hadn't seen before.

"You've got guts, Manders. But don't get too many. Just keep on doing it our way."

Two police officers, Kimenski and Gregory, rode the transporter now, and police cars were more in evidence wherever Manders parked his office. Nothing happened. Manders discussed it one night with Collier.

"Do you suppose he's just bluffing?"

"We can't assume that, George. My first thought when this started, and I'm still standing by it, and so is Wingate, is that our man has something going which he doesn't want to give up. That's why he hasn't left town."

"What could that be?" Manders asked.

"Some kind of racket with a good take. Well, maybe not so good if he attempted a holdup. That looks as though he needed dough because his take had been stopped — temporarily, I'd guess."

Manders saw again that evil face and wildly glittering eyes.

"For dope perhaps?"

"Very likely," Collier agreed. "From your description of him, physical as well as actions, I'd say he was probably a mainliner, taking H, heroin and probably pushing,



too. Maybe the pushing had been blocked and he needed dough to keep himself supplied."

"Well, shouldn't that give the department a lead?" Manders demanded impatiently. "If you know where peddling has been stopped or—wait a minute!" he interrupted himself excitedly. "It was just a few weeks ago I told my kids that if they knew or suspected anything they should tell it to help the police prevent drugs being sold around schools."

Collier nodded. "That grass and speed problem has eased off, but we didn't get the pusher or a description of him."

"Do you think that's it?" Manders asked.

"We're not confining our thinking, George. We're exploring every angle."

The next day Manders, Kimenski and Gregory discovered the word "fink" drawn in the dust of the side of the transporter. And that night a car raced through the alley back of Manders' home. A fire bomb was tossed over a fence, but struck a trellis for climbing tomatoes and failed to reach the house.

"He's getting closer," Wingate growled.

"And just how close are you getting?" Manders wanted to know.

Wingate didn't answer.

The next morning George Manders got a call on the transporter's radiophone. It was from the I.R.S. They weren't going to allow a deduction on a client's income tax re-

turn. Manders didn't argue with the agent. He bargained, claiming another deduction which he had deliberately withheld from the return, just in case.

"Hey," said Kimenski, who had eavesdropped, "that's pretty sharp. I'm going to bring you all my papers tomorrow. Maybe you can cut some corners for me, huh?" He winked.

"No," Manders said firmly. "I don't chisel for my clients. I just know the regulations better than they do. If they withhold information from me which should be in their return, that's their responsibility with I.R.S., not mine."

Kimenski glowered. Gregory stuck his head in the door and barked at him. "What are you doing in there? Get out here and keep your eyes open."

"No," Manders said suddenly. "We're pulling out of here. I just remembered a call I've got to make."

Kimenski had given him an idea.

Gregory stepped aboard and reached for the radiophone. "Where are we going? I've got to report in," he said.

Manders hesitated, punching the starter button. "Ramon's Monterey Cafe," he said, slipping the transporter into gear and pulling out from the curb.

Kimenski's eyes widened. "That dive?"

"Hold it," Gregory said. "I want to make sure we'll have a lot of company in that part of town."

Manders gunned the transporter.

"It's okay. Ramon's a long-time client of mine."

Police swarming into the area was one thing that might spoil a possible solution to this mess. He drove fast, ignoring Gregory's insistence that he should pull over and wait. Cutting through an alley he swung up to the back door of the cafe. Hoping that the two police wouldn't be spotted with him he slid open the window to his left.

"Chico," he called to the young Mexican stacking cases of empty beer bottles in a chicken-wire enclosure. "Tell Ramon I want to see him pronto. Out here." As soon as Chico went inside George Manders turned to Kimenski and Gregory. "Out. Get on the other side out of sight and stay there while I talk to Ramon."

They hesitated. He opened the door. "I've got confidential business to discuss. You're supposed to post yourselves outside anyway. Now get going."

Ramon McNeil, Mexican mother, Irish father, made the transporter tilt when he hauled his bulk in after his red head.

"Hi, George. This ain't your regular time. What's up? We got trouble? You'll fix it up for me, huh?"

"Haven't I always?"

"Sure, sure. I ain't had any beefs with anybody, about dough, I mean. since you been handling the books and all the government forms for me."

"On the figures you gave me,"

Manders said evenly. Ramon's eyes narrowed, watching him. Manders went on quickly. "I'm not saying you withheld anything. And, in the same vein, I never questioned what you said were the sources of some of that money. Right?"

Ramon nodded. "You're a square-shooter, George, and I always leveled with you. If you think I did something to get you in trouble—"

"I am in trouble," Manders said. "It's not your doing, but I need your help. Did you see the picture in the paper the other day about the man the police are looking for?"

Ramon scowled. "The damn fuzz have loused up my business looking for him in here."

"He's looking for me. Ramon. He wants to kill me. I was the only one who saw him kill Pat Riordan. Do you know who he is? Or where he can be found?"

Ramon's bulging face didn't change expression. "I don't know anybody like that picture."

"It wasn't too good." Manders admitted. "But it might be close enough. I think it is. What do you think, Ramon?"

No tenseness revealed itself in Ramon's huge bulk.

"You working for the fuzz?"

"They're holding me. Material witness. I had to send my family out of state because he might have tried to kill them to keep me silent." Manders hesitated. "If anyone could possibly know about him you should, Ramon. Or know some-

one who should know." Sweating, Manders waited vainly for a reply. "I've never asked a favor of you before."

"Some favor." Ramon grunted. "You made it a lousy one when you did get around to it. You're asking me to be a fink."

Manders felt his heart accelerate. "I'm asking you to help save my life. Ramon."

Ramon's lips and eyes were slits. "I never fink for the fuzz. And with the other hand I don't fink about them to my customers. Let them fight their own battles. That way I stay friends with both sides. The fuzz don't see it that way. They know where they can shove it."

He pushed to his feet. George Manders' hopes sagged. This mess was going to go on and on. Either he'd be killed or the police would have to let him close up shop, sell the home, then disappear to Idaho or somewhere else to start up all over again.

"All right. Ramon. No hard feelings. I understand."

"The hell you understand," Ramon retorted. "I don't tell anything to the fuzz, but that don't mean I close my eyes when a good friend like you is in trouble. I'll take care of that myself."

The transporter lurched as he got out. Manders jumped out.

"Ramon, wait. Don't do anything foolish. Then you will be in trouble. You can't take the law into your

own hands." His words bounced off Ramon's broad back.

"Ramon," he pleaded, following him into the cafe.

Ramon brushed past Chico, taking a quart of beer to a booth. Beyond them Manders saw a long-haired hippie type scrambling out of another booth. Then he saw the gun. And there was no mistaking the wildly glittering eyes. The long-haired wig went askew as the killer ducked aside from Ramon to get a clear shot.

Manders grabbed the beer bottle from Chico and hurled it. The killer's shot at him missed.

Manders had no time to analyze his own actions. Normally he was a mild-mannered man, couldn't remember when he'd last had a fight back in grammar school days, had been rejected by the armed forces because he'd once been kicked in the knee by a horse at an uncle's farm. But now, all the tensions and submerged terror of the past days sought release. He charged. He knew he couldn't make it, but he was going to try. And if he got close enough to get his hands on that killer . . .

George Manders heard the blast of shots. Funny he didn't see the spurts of flame nor feel the impact of bullets. Then he saw the killer jerking, twisting, toppling. Bewildered, Manders skidded to a stop, nearly going down on his bad knee. Kimenski advanced beside him with leveled gun. Gregory was barking

for them to get down so he could shoot if necessary.

"He ain't gonna fight any more." Kimenski retorted. "Never again, he won't."

Then Wingate and John Collier were coming in through the front door.

"You damn lucky fool!" Wingate swore at Manders. "You walked right into his trap!"

He was swearing too much to explain. Manders looked inquiringly at Collier.

"We've been watching your mail since that letter the other day," Collier said. "This morning there was a request on Ramon's stationery asking you to come down here on a bookkeeping problem. We knew it wasn't Ramon's handwriting, and just about then we got the relay that you were already here."

Ramon swore first at the "snooping" police, then at the killer's body. "He must have taken the paper and envelope from my desk when the joint was jumping. Before that he'd been asking when you were due here, George. Guess it was too long for him to wait."

Manders spoke to Wingate. "So he probably already knew my truck when he attempted that liquor store holdup."

"Yeah," Wingate growled, looking at Ramon. "And despite his disguise when he hung around here, you knew him!"

"No," Manders said loudly for the benefit of Ramon's customers. "Ramon didn't fink on him. We did have a problem in his bookkeeping and I unthinkingly followed him inside when he came to get additional data."

Wingate's expression was dubious, but Collier spoke pointedly. "I'll buy that."

"All right." Wingate muttered.

Ramon McNeil smiled. "Then we're all good friends all around, huh? Drinks on the house for everybody!"

"We'll take rain checks," said Wingate. He shook his head at Manders. "We would have got to our man eventually, but you just added it up faster than we did." He grinned. "I never was any good at arithmetic in school."

"I would have come out with a minus total if—" Manders turned to Kimenski. "Bring your tax papers around. I'll see what I can do, for any of you."

Then George Manders hurried out to the transporter. He had a long distance call to make to Idaho.

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BULLETS FOR TWO

*A hunted man, watching always for
Death . . . a kill-happy kid . . . a day
when their trails met and crossed.*

by EDWARD D. HOCH



CAPTAIN LEOPOLD should have been home in bed. He should have been almost anywhere except where he was, standing in the chill rain of an autumn's late afternoon waiting for a killer to give himself up.

Lieutenant Fletcher stood beside him, half under the skimpy protection of a metal awning, watching the street corner where Bill Adams had promised to appear.

Leopold sneezed violently and Fletcher said, "You should be home in bed, captain. That cold's going to turn into pneumonia in this weather."

"He wants to surrender to me," Leopold said, blowing his nose. "He said on the phone it had to be me."

"If I know Adams, he probably wants to take a shot at you."

"That's why you're along, Fletcher."

They waited then in silence for a time, with only the sound of the rain on the nearly deserted street. After a few minutes Leopold sneezed again.

"Won't you at least sit in the car, captain?"

"Quiet! I think this is him!"

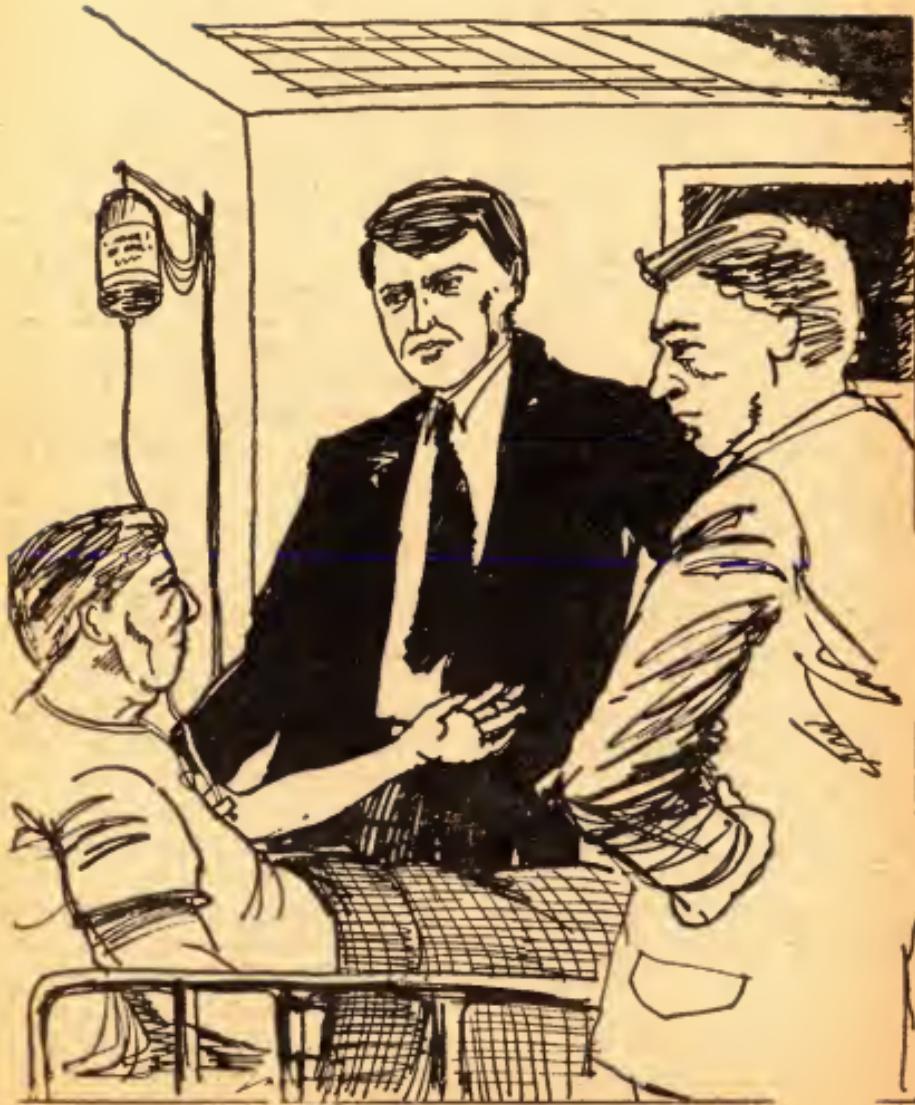
Across the wide intersection, a man in a black raincoat had suddenly appeared. He looked both ways before crossing, though there were no cars in sight, and then headed straight for the two detectives. Despite the rain he walked slowly, almost reluctantly. His name was Bill Adams, and he had already killed three people.

"It's him, all right," Fletcher whispered. "Hope he doesn't try anything. I'd hate to ruin this raincoat by shooting him through the pocket."

"I'll buy you a new one. Just

Featuring

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD



keep the gun on him." Then Leopold blew his nose and stepped into the rain to meet Bill Adams.

Some twenty city blocks away at that moment, a nondescript little man named Jimmy Biggers sprawled bleeding in the gutter, watching through half seeing eyes while his life's blood trickled away with the rain. He watched it run along the wet pavement, mixing with the water to disappear down the sewer grating he could just reach with his outstretched hand. He watched it, and he prayed in the deserted street that someone would find him before he died.

FLETCHER SAID, finishing his frisking of Adams, "No gun, captain."

Leopold blew his nose. "All right." He advised Adams of his rights, and then said, "Do you want to make a statement now, or wait until we get downtown?"

Bill Adams, a tall man with tiny eyes and a broken nose, spoke with a curiously high-pitched voice. "You already know everything I can tell you."

"Is that an admission of the Gates killing, and the others?"

"Sure, I killed them." The voice them all. Gates in his lousy little store and the other two when they started chasing me. They were trying to be heroes."

"Or just good citizens," Leopold said. "Come on. The car's around the corner."

Leopold got in back with their

prisoner, linking his wrist to Adams with the blued metal handcuffs he hadn't used in months. Fletcher was busy in the front seat with the police radio.

After a moment of listening to the static-blurred message, he turned back to Leopold.

"What a day! Did you hear that?" he said.

"I didn't catch it all."

"Two more shootings. A bonded messenger was shot to death in a robbery attempt and a small-time hood was gunned down over on South Street. The messenger's name was George Grantling."

"Who's the hood?"

"Jimmy Biggers. Got a record as long as your arm, mostly minor stuff. He's still alive, might pull through."

"Did he say who shot him?"

Fletcher snorted. "A man he did not know, wearing a fur coat and sunglasses. Now who in hell wears a fur coat and sunglasses on a day like this?"

Captain Leopold shrugged. "A murderer, apparently."

With Adams locked away safely in his cell, Leopold turned his attention to the shooting of Jimmy Biggers. Fighting back the feverish feeling which had grown on him with the coming of night, he blew his nose once more in front of a disapproving nurse and entered the hospital room.

Biggers, a graying man with a tough face that now seemed as white

as the bed sheets, stared up at him.

"I'm Captain Leopold. I read the statement you made."

"Am I going to die?"

"The doctors think you'll pull through, but it was a bad wound. Close to the heart. Tell me about the man who shot you."

"I told the other cops."

"Tell me."

He closed his eyes and let his head sink back on the pillow. "I was just coming up out of the subway, on my way home. With the rain and all the street was just about deserted. All of a sudden this guy wearing a fur coat and sunglasses appeared from somewhere. He couldn't have been more than ten feet away when he started shooting."

Leopold grunted. "How many times did he fire?"

"Three, I think, but only one bullet hit me. He was firing kind of wild."

"Could he have thought you were someone else?"

"I doubt it like hell! There was nobody else on the street. Nobody saw it happen, and I damn near bled to death in the gutter before a guy happened along to find me."

Leopold pulled up a chair and sat down next to the bed. "Look, Biggers, I know you've got a record. A couple of stick-ups and a half-dozen gambling arrests. You sure this wasn't one of your gang buddies taking a shot at you?"

"I swear to God, captain, I never laid eyes on him before!"



His voice was growing tired and Leopold got up with a sigh. He motioned to the nurse and asked for Biggers' clothing. She led him to the closet and produced a worn suit, shirt and underwear still damp from the rain and soiled with blood.

"There were these," she said. "And the raincoat."

Leopold held the raincoat up to the light and said, "There's no bullet hole in the raincoat, Biggers."

"I still had it open when he shot me. I'd just come out of the subway."

"What—" Leopold started to ask, but the nurse cut him short with a frown.

"You must let him rest now. I'm sure the doctor wouldn't approve of all these questions."

"All right," Leopold agreed reluctantly. "But I'll be back tomorrow."

He went outside, where it was still raining, and walked along the dark, puddled sidewalk to his car. He felt terrible, but he no longer thought he should be home in bed.

Back at headquarters, he sought out Lieutenant Fletcher, finding him finally in the records section, where he was keeping awake on black coffee while he pored over mug shots.

"I thought you were going home, captain," Fletcher said, glancing up from his work. "It's after eleven."

Leopold blew his nose. "I was at the hospital, questioning Biggers. What's been 'happening'?"

"Nothing much," Fletcher grumbled. "Nothing good, anyway. I'm trying to get a lead on that robbery murder."

In his concern with the Biggers case, Leopold had forgotten about the slain messenger. "Any witnesses?"

"Just one that counts for anything. She's still here, dictating a statement, if you want to talk with her."

Leopold nodded. "Might as well."

Her name was Gloria Rame, and she was a graying woman in her late thirties. Her eyes were tired, and it was obvious from her dress and hair that she'd long ago stopped caring too much about her appearance. She worked as a secretary during the day, until four o'clock, and then she took the subway from there to a neighborhood tailor shop, where she worked three evenings a week.

"It was right on the subway platform," she said, speaking with a quick certainty. "The others had all just taken an express train, and there was just me and this uniformed messenger waiting for the local.

Suddenly this masked man appeared from somewhere with a gun. I screamed and the messenger pulled a gun he was carrying. They both fired at the same time, I think. The messenger fell down and the masked man turned and ran."

"What did the killer look like? How was he dressed?"

"I don't know. Average height, and he was wearing a dark suit and hat."

"No coat?"

"No."

"Then he wouldn't have gotten too far in the rain without getting mighty wet," Leopold mused. "What about the mask he was wearing?"

"It was just a white handkerchief tied over his nose and mouth."

Leopold questioned her for a few more moments and then arranged for a police car to drive her home. He went back into the records room where Fletcher was working.

"What was this Grantling carrying?" he asked. "Something valuable enough for him to be armed."

"Twenty thousand dollars worth of diamonds, in a pouch. They were still on his body. Our killer apparently panicked."

Leopold sneezed again. "I think I need some hot soup. Let's go across the street."

"Fine by me."

They had soup and a sandwich at the little lunch counter that catered to off-duty cops and city hall workers. The warmth of the soup made Leopold feel a little better, and he

turned his attention to the case once more. "How many people knew this guy was carrying the diamonds?"

"He made the run every week, though sometimes he only carried a few thousand in stones. He works for the jewelers' exchange. I suppose maybe twenty or thirty people knew about it. There'd never been trouble before, though."

"How about the witness, Gloria Rame? Does her story check out?"

"As near as we can tell. No one else saw the shooting, but there was a report of a man running from the scene."

"Everyone runs in subway stations."

Fletcher finished his sandwich. "What about the other shooting?"

"Biggers? I don't know. His story doesn't ring true. I think he knows who shot him and he's covering up, figuring on handling it himself. We will have to check out his known enemies, find out if he was running up any big gambling tabs."

"I know who can tell us that," Fletcher said. "And he'll be closing up just about now. Andy Augustine."

"Let's go see him," Leopold said.

Andy Augustine was a gruff but friendly man who operated a middle-class restaurant overlooking the Sound. It was a popular place for summer dining, where a window table afforded a view of boating and water skiing activities. In the fall, and especially on a rainy night, Augustine's business was likely to

fall off drastically. The night's grosses never particularly concerned Andy Augustine though. He ran a chain of six horserooms in the city, and controlled perhaps eighty per cent of the gambling activities.

"I'm just closing," he said as they entered, looking up grudgingly from behind the bar where he was checking the cash register tape. He was big and bald and built like an ox, and his round face was a familiar one, turning up at events as diverse as bowling tournaments and political picnics.

"It's just us, Andy," Leopold said. "Want to ask you a few questions."

"Well, sure. Ask away, captain."

"Fellow named Biggers was shot today. He's still alive, but in bad shape."

"Jimmy Biggers?"

"That's him."

"Sorry to hear that. He's a friend of mine. Who shot him?"

"That's what we're trying to find out. Was he into anybody for gambling debts?"

The round man shrugged his shoulders. "How would I know?"

"It's late in the evening for games, Andy," Leopold told him. "Did Biggers owe you money?"

"Yeah, I guess a little."

"Enough to get himself shot?"

"Not by me!"

"Who else did he owe money to?"

"Small amounts to lots of people."

"Like who?" Leopold pressed.

"That guy on TV tonight. The one who killed the three people."

"Adams? He owed Bill Adams money?"

"Not much. A hundred bucks or so."

"Thanks." Leopold said. "Thanks a lot."

On the way back to headquarters Fletcher asked, "What do you think, captain? Adams calls us and offers to surrender, then pulls one last killing while we're standing in the rain waiting for him?"

"You think that's it?" Leopold asked slowly.

"It could be."

"Any chance of matching the bullet from Biggers with the ones from Adams' other victims?"

Fletcher frowned at the damp pavement ahead. "Nothing there. The bullet went right through Biggers. We haven't recovered it, or the other two slugs he said the guy in the fur coat fired at him. Chances are the rain washed them down the sewer."

Leopold thought about the man in the hospital bed. "He's lucky it didn't hit a bone."

"You think Adams shot him?"

"I doubt it. If a man's confessing to three murders, he doesn't rig an elaborate plot to cover up a fourth. He'd have just shot Biggers and stood over the body waiting for us. And it's not surprising they knew each other. They were both small-time hoods, stick-up artists growing up in the same neighborhood."

"Then who do you think shot Biggers? Andy Augustine, maybe?"

"I don't know," Leopold admitted. "I was just trying to imagine how he'd look in a fur coat and sunglasses."

In the morning Leopold's cold was worse. He pondered the possibilities of staying in bed, but with two unsolved shootings on the docket he couldn't bring himself to do it. He dressed warmly and was thankful at least that the sun showed signs of replacing the rain clouds of yesterday.

"You should be home in bed," Fletcher said when he saw him.

"I think you said the same thing yesterday. Anything new on our two cases?"

"Not a thing. I checked with the hospital. Biggers had a good night, but he's not completely out of danger yet."

Leopold grunted. He picked up the morning paper and read about the surrender of William Adams. "Your idea about Adams shooting Biggers before he surrendered does raise some interesting possibilities," he told Fletcher. "Let's go out to the hospital and see how Biggers is coming along this morning."

The nurse on duty glared at Leopold's red nose and watery eyes, but let them enter the wounded man's room. Jimmy Biggers looked up drowsily from his pillow and asked, "Don't you guys ever sleep?"

"It's morning, Jimmy. We've got a few more questions."

"What kind?"

"You didn't tell us about your gambling debts. You didn't tell us you owed money to Augustine and Adams and a lot of others."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Just that it gives you a motive, Jimmy."

He tried to roll over in the bed. "What in the hell are you talking about?"

"The man you shot was George Grantling, a messenger for the jewelers' exchange. He shot you during an attempted robbery in which you killed him."

"You're out of your mind!" Biggers tried to rise from the bed, his face crimson with rage and fear.

"Am I, Jimmy? You have a record of stick-ups, and you were deeply in debt. Robbing the weekly diamond delivery must have seemed awfully easy to you. Except that Grantling started shooting. You had to run, and the easiest escape route from a subway station is a subway. His bullet had hit you in the chest, and you were bleeding badly by the time you reached South Street.

"There's probably a subway car somewhere with your blood on the floor. When you realized you could not go on, couldn't reach a safe hiding place, you simply collapsed in the street. You probably dropped your own gun down a convenient sewer and waited to be found. The man in the fur coat never existed."

The look on Biggers' face told them all they needed to know, but



he still kept up his front. "You'll have a hard time proving that."

"I don't think so." Leopold went on. "The bandit must have been wounded by Grantling's bullet. Otherwise why did he run without grabbing the pouch of diamonds? You kill a man, and there's nothing between you and the loot except one woman witness and you run off without it? Hardly likely, unless you panicked badly or were wounded. And it was just too much of a coincidence, your coming out of a subway about the same time a man was being killed in a subway some distance away."

"No evidence," Biggers said, but his eyes were closed. He seemed very tired.

"Yes, evidence. Even if we don't find the gun. There was no bullet hole in your raincoat, front or back. You said the coat was open when you were shot, but the bullet passed through your body. There should have been an exit hole in the raincoat. There wasn't, because you weren't wearing it when the messenger shot it. It's an old holdup man's trick to put on or take off a

coat, to change your appearance for the getaway. I would imagine you had the raincoat stashed in a locker or some place where you could grab it quick.

"You put it on *after* you were shot. It covered your wound, but it also told me you weren't shot where they found you. There's blood on your clothes, too, not washed away by the rain, another sign that your first bleeding was done indoors, in a dry place."

"All right," Biggers said. "All right."

That was all.

When Leopold and Fletcher left the hospital this time there was a guard at Biggers' door. He wouldn't be going anywhere, except to a prison cell.

"You cleared up both shootings at once," Fletcher said, somewhat amazed.

Leopold only smiled. "I had to, Fletcher. I'm feeling so damned lousy I don't think I could have found us two murderers today." He sneezed once more, and decided he should be home in bed.



The Art of Fiction

by BARRY N. MALZBERG



"... but words can never hurt me." Can't hurt? You gotta be kidding. Words not only can hurt—they can kill!

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

Thank you very much for sending your manuscript, "Tear Her Open," to *Slaughterhouse Magazine*. We find this story appealing in many ways and are happy to inform you that we are willing to publish it under our usual terms and conditions.

Only one question concerns us and that is one of credibility: some of our editorial staff do not believe that a plain kitchen knife would accomplish, in the unskilled hands of your protagonist, the spectacular damage which the story says it does. However, minor editing can fix this up and otherwise we find the piece

very well-written and terrifying, just the kind of thing which we like to see for our readers. It is always a pleasure to encounter a new writer who can deliver the kind of material we seek and we hope to hear from you with further work. In the meantime, we look forward to your reply to this letter and would appreciate any autobiographical data you would care to give us for our files to pass on in turn to our readers who like to have a sense of intimacy with the authors they read.

THE EDITORS
Slaughterhouse Magazine

DEAR EDITORS:

Thank you for your kind letter. I am very pleased to know that "Tear Her Open" is acceptable to you since I have always admired your magazine and have wanted for years to be a published writer in the mystery field. This story is indeed my first sale and one of the most exciting events of my life.

In answer to the question you raise I assure you that it is possible to accomplish all the damage I say it did with a plain kitchen knife. Wielded by a strong hand and a twisting motion a kitchen knife, I can emphatically tell you, will do all of that and more to the female corpus and this detail is au-thentic.

I look forward very much to your check which will enable me to further finance my writing career.

Gratefully,
JOSEPH JENKINS

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

Thank you for your new submission, "A Shot in the Night." We were very pleased to see it here but although it shows all the fine qualities of style and characterization which so distinguished your first story, several of us here are disturbed by the question of motivation. It seems unreasonable that your protagonist, William Mallette, would use a high-powered rifle and an elaborate series of plans merely to shoot a random stranger on the Concourse.

The lack of specific motive for the crime is against the nature of the short story and also gives the resolution a rather contrived flavor.

For these reasons, we are not sure that we can buy your story. We are hesitant to reject it because new writers of your quality come along only rarely and this piece is certainly well-written but our readers tend to become quite disturbed at work which does not conform to the usual rules of plotting and structure and I doubt, hence, if the story is publishable.

Perhaps you have some ideas as to how the selection of the victim and the principal's reasons for killing him could be made more credible. We will hold the manuscript in our files and await word from you. In the meantime, thank you for your continued interest in *Slaughterhouse*.

THOMAS PERRET
Editorial Director

DEAR MR. PERRET:

Thank you for your letter on my story "A Shot in the Night." In answer to your question I hasten to assure you that William Mallette's selection of a random victim is completely credible and in tune with his psychology. The kind of man who he is — an impoverished background, a lack of formal education accompanied by the weird vocabulary and florid gestures of the intellectually defensive, a sense of raging frustration at all that he feels life has denied him, a certain low ability with the language — a kind of man such as this, as I say, would tend toward the commission of exactly such a crime and this is well foreshadowed in the characterization parts of the story.

He would need to strike out in a random way, since he believes that life has been random in making him so unhappy and the conclusion thus becomes perfectly credible. I have studied all of these aspects of fiction in several large textbooks taken from the local library, and believe me, it is the truth. William Mallette would have done exactly such a thing. You must also consider the terrible and overwhelming sense of guilt which he has at certain previous unmentionable acts only hinted at in the context of the story.

Believing himself to be terribly and abysmally guilty of a certain brutal murder he would attempt to turn the guilt outwards toward a total stranger who would become its

focus. Psychologically speaking and I have read a lot of psychology, this is entirely truthful.

I hope you will accept my story as is. I really need the money quite badly Mr. Perret as I am now attempting to finance a full-time writing career and had been counting upon at least this sum in order to continue my work. I was very surprised and disheartened to see on my first sale how really little your magazine paid. I thought that a magazine which has the reputation yours does treated its contributors more generously — but realize that new writers like disheartened protagonists often bear the brunt of the world's brutalities and am willing to forget all of this while only looking forward with a certain modest hope to a raise on this second and (to me) much better and more profound story.

Very sincerely,
JOSEPH JENKINS

DEAR MR. JENKINS:

As you know, we were quite sorry at finally rejecting "A Shot in the Night" for lack of credibility and had hoped to make up for this disappointment to you in your next submission but I'm afraid that "I've Killed the Editor of a Mystery Magazine" simply is not for us in any form or fashion and in many ways makes us question the existence of the promise we felt clearly evident in your earlier submissions. Your protagonist's scheme to kill the ed-

itor of a crime magazine simply because the editor has rejected a piece close to the heart of the narrator is quite bizarre, quite strained, utterly contrived and mostly preposterous.

In the bargain, editors and readers hate stories about writers like poison and find it difficult to become involved in their craft problems. To our readers, writers and editors are a faceless mass of servitors performing clearly defined functions and pieces complaining about their neurotic or occupational problems tend to bore them.

We are therefore unequivocally rejecting this piece. Although this may sound a bit presumptuous, it is our opinion that you are now

writing too much too fast and your subsequent work has lost the wonderful veracity and immediacy of your first story. You are wandering further and further from the truth. Mr. Jenkins, and perhaps should reapply yourself to that aforementioned set of writing textbooks which have much left to teach you.

In answer to your covering letter requesting a personal interview, we do not give these because of press of work but our address is on the letterhead and if you would like to drop by some afternoon, one of us, if he has the time, might be able to chat with you for an instant or so.

THE EDITORS

Slaughterhouse Magazine



In every issue: a complete short MIKE SHAYNE novel in:

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Outside, a man lay dead. A man
who had been his friend. He nod-
ded. There was work to be done.



A SLIGHT ERROR

by
**STEPHEN
OVERHOLSER**

HORACE "PEN" Pennington, independent investigator, heard about his former protege, Jeremy Craft, from the homicide office of the police department.

He left his office in a rush, passed through the reception room, and told his secretary, Rabbit, where he was going and when he might return. Pennington spoke in a series of growls and half-words. Rabbit, somehow, made notes from these sounds.

Pennington strode — walk, don't run — down the hallway to the clos-

ed doors of the elevator, pressed the button, and waited. The elevator, as usual, was uncooperative. It was older even than Pennington, and acted like it.

Then, remembering his fool doctor's advice, he turned and yanked open the door marked STAIRS. He descended seven floors — "Get regular exercise, but at your age walk, don't run" — and when he reached the main lobby, he saw the elevator there.

Outside, he flagged a cab. While the driver waited for an opening in the noon traffic, Pennington looked across the street at the new police department building.

It was a frightening place, Pennington thought, as the taxi moved. The building was an orderly, fourteen-story collection of glass, steel, and blindingly polished hallways. A man was afraid to touch anything. Pennington had been polite and silent as he took the tour guided by the chief himself, but he knew he was never going back—at least not until the place was broken in.

Across town, behind the flashing lights of the ambulance, Pennington stepped out of the cab and neatly elbowed his way into a knot of onlookers. He saw Sergeant Rogers of the homicide office. There on the sidewalk lay a sandy-haired, long young man, his body partly covering a stain of darkening red.

Pennington had seen many corpses in his career, but every time it was someone he had known, close-

ly or not, he felt something tug and twist inside him; he felt an unwilling recognition. There was always a *No, it can't be* writhing inside Pennington.

Sergeant Rogers spoke over the bent heads of the lab crew, "Can you give us a positive?"

Pennington's grey head nodded slowly.

"Jeremy Craft," he said. And he thought, Jeremy Craft, a young man in a bad business, a young man trained by me, not trained well enough. Jeremy Craft was tough, quick and sharp-eyed, but — what? Inexperienced? Yes. Who wasn't? At sixty-seven years of age Pennington himself felt inexperienced. He remembered how eager Jeremy had been to hang out his shingle, how impatient and frustrated he had been with the routine assignments — routine but necessary.

"Who got him, Pen?" Sergeant Rogers asked.

Pennington shrugged.

"What was he working on? For whom?"

"Don't know," Pennington said. How could he know? He stared into the square face of the investigating sergeant as if looking for an answer. He got one.

"I thought you guys were together," Sergeant Rogers said.

"Oh," Pennington said quietly. "Yeah. We were." As he absently watched the covered body being loaded on a stretcher and rolled to the back of the ambulance, Penning-

ton told the sergeant that Jeremy had opened his own office two weeks ago, that Jeremy had big ideas.

"Everybody's impatient these days," he concluded.

The wheeled stretcher was shoved into the back of the ambulance by one of the white-coated men. When the tailgate closed, it made a sound like a refrigerator door. The body of Jeremy Craft lay in the back of the ambulance, covered by a white sheet.

Sergeant Rogers briefly described the murder. He held a small note pad in one hand and glanced at it as he spoke. Stating the time of death, he then pointed where the victim had stood when shot. Apparently he had left the restaurant, crossed the walk to the curb, and stopped. Preliminary lab reports indicate the victim was shot once from a passing car.

Pennington looked across the wide, asphalt thoroughfare. It was four-lane, no parking, two-way, full of traffic. Across the street was a big department store, busy now at one o'clock. The floors above the store looked like offices.

Noticing that the onlookers had melted away, Pennington asked about witnesses.

Sergeant Rogers shook his head. "None," he said. "Oh, one man who was passing by said he thought the victim had had a heart attack. That indicates the murder weapon made little noise."



Pennington nodded. Even over the sound of a car horn, a high-caliber weapon would have been heard. Silencer? Maybe. He asked what the wound had looked like.

Rogers referred to the note pad. "Heart shot. Went all the way

through. Exit beneath left shoulder blade. Found bits of lead on granite block of foundation. Rogers pointed to the foundation of the restaurant. Looking up from the notes he said. "Pen, the wound looked so small to me that my first thought was that it had to be .22 caliber."

"Your first thought?"

"What bothers me is that it was very powerful."

Pennington recalled an article he had read. He said, "Some small bore, high-velocity hand weapons are being manufactured nowadays. There is even talk of developing plastic bullets and plastic casings in the near future. That's the kind of technology, unfortunately, that is coming out of the war."

"Fiberglass weapons and plastic ammunition," Rogers said, shaking his head. "What's next?"

"Who knows?" Pennington said.

Rogers made a few more qualified speculations about the murder of Jeremy Craft.

"It is my guess that Jeremy was waiting for a ride, perhaps a taxi, which explains, I believe, why he was standing so near the curb."

That seemed obvious to Pennington. But he had to admire Rogers for being careful not to state a guess as a fact. Rogers was smart.

Jeremy Craft had been smart.

Rogers was saying, "Often, several hours following a crime, a witness shows up. People get to thinking — well, you know how these things go."

Pennington knew.

"I'll give you a call if anything turns up."

"Thanks," Pennington said, reaching out to shake hands. He almost forgot his manners as Rogers turned away and opened the door of the squad car.

Pennington cleared his throat and said, "If I hear anything, you'll know about it."

Sergeant Rogers waved in recognition of the courtesy. Then the black squad car flowed into the stream of whispering traffic, leaving Horace Pennington alone with the passing pedestrians, alone beside a fading, brownish stain on the concrete sidewalk.

"CABBAGE." Rabbit said, as Pennington entered the reception room of his office.

Rabbit, Pennington's secretary for twenty-nine years, stood up behind her desk, waving a brown envelope. Rabbit claimed to have once been a reader of Damon Runyon and she had absorbed some of the street language used by Runyon's characters. Pennington suspected she had created some of her own terms, but he never challenged her about it.

"Cabbage" was money. "Heater" was a pistol, and "ventilate" was shot. "Chopper," however, was not a machine gun; it was Rabbit's typewriter. She had, she said, needed a new chopper for twenty-eight years.

But over the years Pennington



and Mrs. Sarah Mitchell — widow, Rabbit — had evolved an elaborate and subtle system of communication.

Now, sensing Pen's state of mind, Rabbit's buck-toothed smile sank, and she withdrew the envelope and touched her boss's hand.

"Was it Jeremy?" she asked.

Pennington nodded. Walking on to his private office, he made a sound that would have been meaningless to anyone else, but to Rabbit meant, "Come on."

The office was warm-appearing, carpeted and paneled, and dominated by a huge desk, scarred and ancient. The top of the desk was incredibly cluttered, but the office itself was, in contrast, neat. The one thing Rabbit was not allowed to touch was the desk. That was a Law. At various times Pennington had said the desk was his brother, his friend, his confidant. And once he

had claimed, "Me. That desk is me."

"And now, radio fans," Pennington said, sitting in the swivel chair behind the desk, "let us move on"—he waved for the brown envelope—"to the next thrill and chill-packed episode in the life and times of Horace Pennington and the faithful Rabbit in their ceaseless efforts in tracking down the purveyors of crime, the advocates of evil, and the champion jerks of the world, if not the universe."

Rabbit's vocabulary was not vast, but she was sensitive to meaning, and she knew that sarcasm meant sadness — the more sarcasm, the deeper the sadness.

Then Rabbit said, "You should get out of this business, old man. You never were any good at it, but now that you're old and forgetful, you've become worthless."

Pennington snorted, then laughed. She had removed a nagging thought from a dark corner of his mind, and held it up for ridicule. He did not openly thank her.

"Let me take you away from this evil place," he said. "I'll take you away and help you spend your money."

That reminded Rabbit of cabbage. She had not opened the envelope, but from the weight and feel, she became convinced there was money inside. She held the envelope out to him.

"Cabbage," she said.

"Hand delivered?"

Rabbit nodded. "A pimply teen-

ager brought it. He should have been in school."

"An even two thousand," Pennington said, counting the one hundred dollar bills. Included in the envelope were half a dozen travel brochures. Some were advertisements for Europe, others pictured and described cruises in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean.

Rabbit giggled.

"That's what I like about this business," Pennington said. "Paid vacations."

"I've never been on a cruise," Rabbit said, letting the sentence fade suggestively.

He held out the money to her. "Well, here's your chance. Do as they ask, spend their money, and see what happens."

"What would happen?" Rabbit asked. Damon Runyon, to her knowledge, hadn't covered that.

"They would own you, dear."

"Who's they?"

Pennington asked, "Do you think we'll find out?"

Rabbit pressed her lips together. She had caught on to this game years ago. So she spoke with deepening voice and authority, "I think we'll soon find out, dear."

"Don't imitate me," Pennington told her for the millionth time.

"I love you," Rabbit said, turning and then walking out of the private office. She walked well.

"Yeah," Pennington said roughly, stuffing the money back into the brown envelope.

The next day Sergeant Rogers was on the phone.

"I can confirm that Jeremy Craft was shot from a vehicle in the near lane of traffic. He was killed by a .22 caliber weapon."

"Nothing new, I take it," Pennington said.

But Rogers casually answered. "Nothing but a witness."

Touche, thought Pennington.

A secretary in an office in the Wilkes Building across the street was gazing out the window when she should have been working—and was looking right at Jeremy when a dark-colored taxi blocked her view. When the taxi passed, the victim was down on the sidewalk. The secretary, by the way, thought Craft had had a heart attack, too."

"Don't talk about it," Pennington said. "I believe in the power of suggestion. Always have." When Rogers chuckled, Pennington added. "Your time is coming."

"Okay, Pen," Rogers said. "I'll take your word for it."

Pennington was feeling almost smug about having the last word, and was ready to hang up, when an inconsistency leaped into his mind.

"Say, I've never seen a dark cab in the city. They're all light-colored. It has something to do with traffic safety."

"Right," Rogers said calmly.

He's still ahead of me; I ought to quit talking to this young smart aleck, Pennington thought, knowing Rogers was not young.

"So it's an out-of-town taxi."

"Or a fake," Rogers said. "We're checking. We're trying to locate the drivers who were in the area."

"They're the best sources of information ever invented by man," Pennington said.

"You know it," Rogers said.

"Thanks for calling."

"One more thing, Pen," Rogers said. He paused. "I'd rather you didn't look into this case. I strongly suggest—"

"Don't worry," Pennington said. "I won't. You're the people who have the tools for this kind of thing."

There was another, longer pause. He's only across the street, Pennington thought, trying to visualize him. He heard Rogers breathing.

"I mean it, Pen."

Pennington knew what he was thinking. *I'm going out for revenge, which is justified, maybe, but it could make me very careless, very reckless. So I should stay away from this one.*

"Did you send me two thousand bucks?"

"Hardly," Rogers answered.

"Don't worry, young man," Pennington said. "I'm not in this case. Good luck to you. Call again."

"Okay. Thanks," Rogers said. "See you, Pen."

Two weeks later—one routine check-out for a law firm, two divorces later—Horace Pennington had visitors. Rabbit had been watching for them every day, but at last

report she had almost decided no one was coming, hard as that was to believe. If she had \$2,000 to give away, you can bet *she* would check up on whoever received it.

But then she came into the private office, wide-eyed.

"They're here!" she whispered. "It's them! One's carrying a heater. I saw it."

"Send them in," Pennington said, and he started searching for the brown envelope in the rubble that covered his desk. When he was aware of the two men, he glanced up. Rabbit was correct in guessing their identity, although most people would not have caught it. The men were well-dressed, good-shouldered.

"Sit down, gentlemen," Pennington said, as he continued poking through the papers on the desk. "I'm having a little problem," he muttered, causing the men to chuckle warmly. Pennington found the electric bill that he swore that incompetent company had never sent; the reason it had reached his desk at all was that it arrived on a day that Rabbit was sick and stayed home. It was the first day she had missed in four years, Pennington thought.

Happily, he extracted the brown envelope from a disordered pile of papers, and he smiled as he thrust it out to the nearest man.

He did not smile back. He was good-looking and young. Like the other man, he could have been an American businessman, or a law-

yer. But there were tip-offs; one bent, puffed ear, a small but long white scar on a cheek, a handful of uneven knuckles.

"It is yours, isn't it?" Pennington asked, letting the envelope drop. It landed on the carpet between the man's feet. The other man shifted in the chair, barely showing a gun butt. "Or your boss's," Pennington added.

The first man nodded. In a pleasant voice he said, "The Man knows you."

"Not very well, apparently," Pennington said.

"The Man likes you," he said. "The Man has no quarrel with you."

"Good," Pennington said. "I never have enough friends."

The sarcasm was lost on the young man. This was the kind of conversation Pennington liked. He was far ahead. Oh, there was no challenge in it, but after going through a wringer washer with Rogers, this was refreshing.

"There was a slight error," the young man said, "and the Man wants to make it up to you. He feels very bad about it. He respects you and your work and wants no quarrel with you." He picked up the envelope. "If this is not a large enough sum, I am empowered to increase it. Substantially."

Suddenly there was a challenge. What the devil was he talking about?

The second fine-looking young man broke the silence. "Look, Mr. Pennington, the Man is sorry about

what happened. We're sorry. As he said, it was a slight error. We thought he was somebody else, and we had instructions to take care of him. Now, we've got no quarrel with you, just as we had no quarrel with Mr. Craft."

Then Pennington knew. Rising, he roared, "You goddam cheap hoods. You don't kill a man and call it a slight error. Not around me, you don't." Pennington's hands were buried in the rubble covering his desk, a fierce, jaw-clenched expression on his lined face.

The two men stood, and for a moment looked as if they were being driven back by the sheer outrage of the older man.

The one on the left said, "Look. Mr. Pennington, if we had known he was your partner—"

"Nobody buys me! Nobody! Now, get out!" Pennington's pulse pounded. These men were polite, clean-cut, and sickening. They talked of murder as most men would talk of a change in the weather. It was nothing but a slight error, you see.

But then Pennington saw he had been careless, very reckless.

"The Man prepared us for this." One of the young men held a slim, long-barreled revolver. It was almost dainty looking. That, Pennington thought, must be a very high-velocity, quiet .22 caliber weapon.

"Shoot" Pennington said. "Shoot before I stuff that thing down your throat."

The two men, glancing at each other, smiled.

"The Man wants to see you alive, Mr. Pennington, but I will shoot if you refuse to cooperate."

"My secretary—"

"Your secretary won't hear anything. But, as you can guess, we would have to eliminate her, too."

Pennington had been cornered before and he knew the feeling. No matter what action he took, he could not free himself. There was no way out. What good did nearly half a century of experience do him now? He felt old when at last he said. "Okay, I'll go." But he doubted that he was going very far, that these men were actually taking him to see anyone.

"Don't do anything that might make your secretary suspicious," said the man with the dainty pistol. "Don't say a word to her. Nothing."

"I always give her a phone number," Pennington said, "so she'll know where I can be reached."

"All right," the young man said, holstering the pistol. "Make up a number and tell her. But say nothing lady."

else. She seemed like such a nice

Before the second man opened the door, he turned to Pennington and said, "By the way, I'm going to look at the telephone on your secretary's desk. I'd better not hear you say that number."

Pennington nodded, dismayed. That was exactly what he had planned to do. He was pretty sure that



would have made Rabbit catch on.

One man in front, one behind. Pennington walked out of his office and passed through the reception room. Over his shoulder he said. "881-4141."

It was the number of the homicide office.

Pennington walked between the two men to the end of the hall. They stopped at the double doors of the elevator. One of the young men pressed the button. They waited in silence. To pass the time, Pennington asked who the "Man" was.

The curt answer was. "John Smith."

"Sure," Pennington said.

The young man at the right said. "Doesn't this elevator work?"

"Yes," Pennington said, "but it's slow."

"I'd say so."

"How many floors up are we?"

"Seven," Pennington answered.

"That's too far to walk," one of the men said, pushing the button again.

They waited. The young man on the left began to fidget. Then the light over the doorway finally came on. Pennington waited for the humming and moaning that preceded the opening of the doors. It was very slow.

That is how you get when you're old, Pennington thought.

But at last there was humming and moaning. The doors parted. There in the elevator stood Sergeant Rogers flanked by two uniformed policemen.

There was an awful fraction of a second that could as well have been an hour, a lifetime, as the six men stared at each other, frozen, but poised on the brink of action.

Pennington recovered first. He took a half-step back, grabbing an arm of the man on either side of him, and pulled them off balance. It was enough.

The two policemen beside Rogers drew their service revolvers, and the close range shoot-out that had seemed inevitable was avoided.

Disarmed and handcuffed, the two young men were led into the elevator by the uniformed policemen. There was humming and moaning, and the doors shut.

Rogers held the dainty .22 caliber pistol and inspected it.

"It was nice that you could come" Pennington said.

Before Rogers could reply, Rabbit leaned out of the doorway down the hall and said, "What are you doing here. Sergeant? I just called your office, but I never got past your secretary. First she said you were there, then she said you were not."

"What I need," Rogers said, "is a secretary like you."

Rabbit said, "Well, I knew I was supposed to call you. Pen would rather go to the dentist than to your fancy office. Anyway, I was afraid those dumb men were going to ventilate Pen."

"Get back to work," Pennington said.

Rogers turned and pressed the button for the elevator.

"What got us started was the fake cab," he said. "Cabbies started calling us before we even had a chance to find out which ones had been in the area. They were pretty upset about it. One cabbie even followed the fake. He saw it dumped, and he caught the license number of the car that picked up the driver and another man — the two goons who called on you."

"But that was almost two weeks ago," Pennington said.

"I've had them watched," Rogers said. "Why get them for faking a cab? That was all we could prove."

"Okay, now you have them for murder," Pennington said. "Who's the Man?"

"John Smith."

"I'm serious."

"So am I, Pen," Rogers said. "That's his legal name as of two years ago. It fits his sense of humor, I guess. You know him as Morey Morrison."

Pennington sighed. "He's a small-time crook. Big operator in a candy store."

"Not any more," Rogers said. "Somewhere along the line he got in big. He probably changed his name to celebrate. We think he's in the heroin business."

"Happy graduation, John Smith," Pennington said. "Can you get him?"

Rogers shrugged. "We have a chance this time, thanks to you. If one of those two goons who called on you is an addict, he may become interested in helping us. If not, at least we'll have them off the streets. John Smith is next."

Pennington was going to say that he was looking forward to testifying against the two men, when he thought of something else. Rabbit had tried to call Rogers, but she had not got through to him. "How did you get here so fast?"

"The man I had detailed to watch John Smith's goons notified me that they had gone into this building. I remembered thinking that it was only across the street. That was in the back of my mind. Then my secretary said that Rabbit was on the phone. I felt like a fool for not putting it together sooner. I grabbed a couple of men and came over here on the run."

Rogers paused. "I have to hand it to you, Pen. You not only broke this case in style, you—" he motioned to the pistol—"even called this right. You really keep up on things, don't you?" Rogers shook his head in admiration.

Pennington smiled. "I try," he said.

At last the elevator came, and Rogers stepped inside.

"I have a plan," Rabbit said, following Pennington into his private office.

"You mean scheme," Pennington said. "Men have plans, women have schemes."

Pennington sat in the swivel chair. He had not felt so good in two weeks. It had seemed that every time he made a move or said a word he had only proved how far behind everybody else he was. Everything he knew was no good to him. The young men of the world knew it all.

But then things had come together, a couple of goons had underestimated him—that was a slight error—and Rogers had said, "You really keep on things, don't you?"

It must be true that old age is nothing more than a state of mind. When I'm old, Pennington thought. I'll find out.

He must have had his eyes closed. For when he tipped forward in the chair, he was not ready to believe what he saw. Rabbit held a waste basket to the edge of the old

desk. She scooped papers, string apple cores, and orange rinds into the basket. In a few minutes Pennington was looking at a bare wood desk top.

When he was able to speak he said, "You're fired."

"Here's my plan," Rabbit said, holding up a brochure for a cruise to the South Pacific. "Pen, you have not been out of this office for twelve years and seven months. I looked it up. You went to a funeral on the West Coast. You were gone five whole days."

"You're fired."

"Good," Rabbit said, "because I hate you."

Pennington still had difficulty in believing there was nothing on top of his desk. He couldn't take his eyes from it. Absently, he said, "What would I do on a cruise?"

After an elevator-sized wait, Rabbit said, "We'll think of something."

"We—" Pennington looked at her quickly, then back at the desk top. He cleared his throat and said, "Well, I have to testify against those goons."

Rabbit said nothing.

The wood grain of the desk top was pleasant to look at. It made a

man think of a ship's deck. It made a man think . . .

"How do you know that's the best cruise?" Pennington asked suddenly. "You should have checked around."

Rabbit glanced at the ceiling.

"I *have* checked around," she said. "I know a few things about investigating, too."

"From Damon Runyon, I suppose."

"This cruise is the best."

"How much cabbage?" Pennington asked.

"A lot more than two thousand dollars," Rabbit said. "We're going first class."

Pennington made some sounds then, and Rabbit knew that he was accepting the plan. It would not be long before he would be talking about his plan.

So Rabbit struck again. "And when we get back, I want a new chopper."

"When we get back," Pennington said, "we'll talk about it."

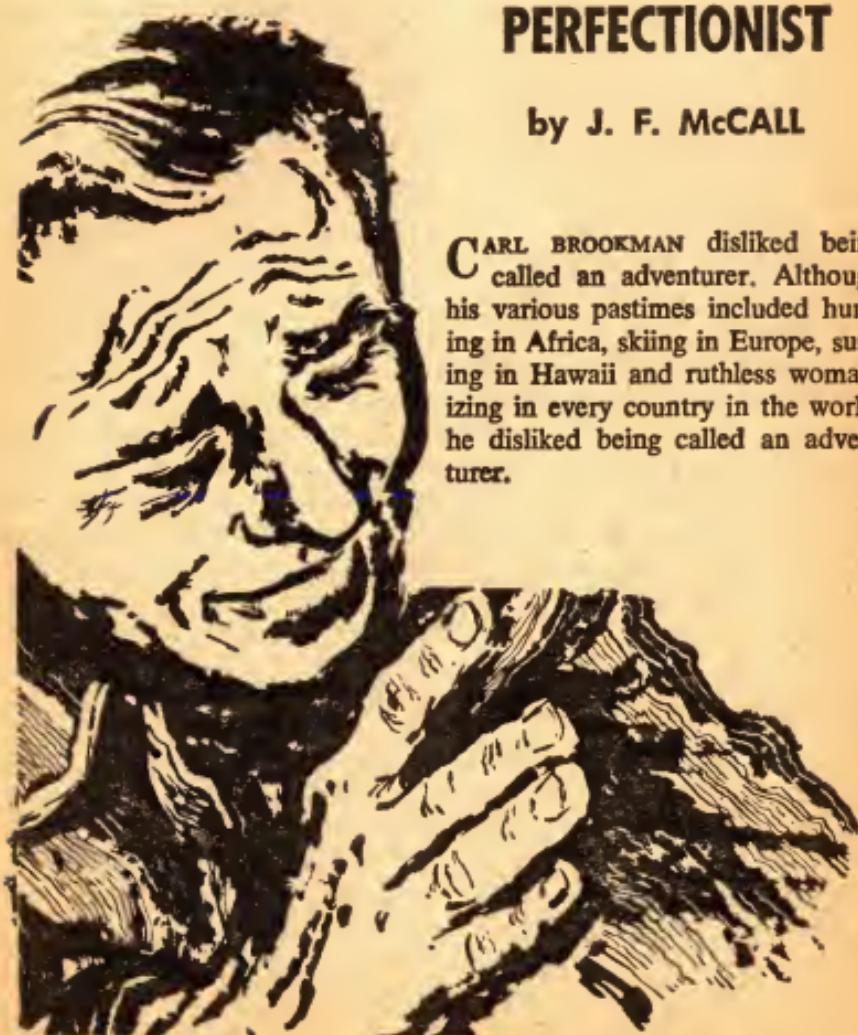
Rabbit smiled suddenly. She turned and walked out of the private office, carrying the full waste basket. She walked well.

He had tasted every thrill of danger, every way to look Death in the face. Now would come the supreme adventure of all. This night he was going to be alone with Murder — and win!

THE PERFECTIONIST

by J. F. McCALL

CARL BROOKMAN disliked being called an adventurer. Although his various pastimes included hunting in Africa, skiing in Europe, surfing in Hawaii and ruthless womanizing in every country in the world, he disliked being called an adventurer.



The word had an ugly connotation. It implied fondness for risking one's life, something Carl would most precious possession? Certainly never do. Endangering his life, his not. Adventure, for Brookman, lay in studying, plotting and calculating a seemingly hazardous deed in such finite detail that all danger was eliminated.

Once he had skied the face of Mont Blanc, faster and more skillfully than it had ever been done before. With his usual graceful perfection, he shooshed straight down its treacherous bulk at a speed which turned the world into a white and blue kaleidoscope.

The spectators gasped, "He laughs in the face of death. What a man." Carl Brookman basked in their fear, exhilarated because he knew fear was pointless. When he stood at the peak of the mountain, ski tips dangling off the edge, he knew he would make the descent perfectly. And why not?

Months prior to the run he had studied the mountain. Not a crevice, mogul or patch of ice escaped his careful scrutiny. He knew its surface as a mother knows her child. His equipment received the same precise attention. Heads or Kastles? What kind of wax for the skis? What type of bindings? From goggles to boots, he labored hour after tedious hour until he was satisfied.

Caution, care and confidence. It was his philosophy that these three words spelled the difference be-

tween witless adventurer and a paragon of physical and mental excellence. To perform a spectacular feat at the risk of one's life, he reasoned, constituted idiocy. Those failing to appreciate life deserved to lose it. But to perform the same feat when intelligence and meticulous attention to detail had erased risk—that was ecstasy.

Carl Brookman had always known he would some day commit murder. It was, he thought, a natural progression to his way of life. Accomplishing the perfect crime would be the ultimate test of his abilities.

Choosing the proper victim was a serious limiting factor. It would hardly be fair to murder a stranger. Where there was no connection between murderer and murdere there was little chance of discovery, and therefore, no challenge to an intelligent man. That sort of crime belonged to the cheap crook or befuddled psychopath. No. Obviously the victim had to be someone close to him, and Brookman was a man of scruples. However quickly he might have sacrificed his friends for profit, he rejected the thought of killing one of them purely for pleasure.

Aunt Harriet's death provided the answer to his dilemma. He had always admired the old girl with the brilliant mind and crippled body, because she had accomplished something that, so far, had eluded him. She made money, lots of it.

Carl Brookman read the news of

her passing with regret, until he recognized the signature at the bottom of the telegram. "Of course," he said aloud. "It's from Aunt Harriet's dear son. I'd forgotten good old cousin Miltie."

Milton Brookman was easy to forget. Carl Brookman recalled him only as a pale entity bearing an irritating family resemblance. He was a vague, indefinite personality, a sketch drawn in chalk. If he had interests or desires independent of Harriet's, it was never apparent. Milton was a satellite created to revolve perpetually around his mother. Now she was dead.

"Poor fellow," Carl Brookman muttered with a smile that would have frightened Faust. "Probably wishes he were dead too. As his only remaining relation, I should be at his side during his sorrow." If his estimate of Aunt Harriet's worth was correct Milton Brookman stood between him and a half million dollars. Victim and motive had been provided. Only method remained undecided.

Harriet's funeral would have been unnerving to a man less steeled than Brookman. Cousin Milton threw himself across his mother's coffin, crying hysterically. Mr. Stokes, the family lawyer, whispered in Carl Brookman's ear. "I know it's quite a burden, but stay with him if you can. His mother was his whole life. With her gone he might—well, do something foolish."

Inevitably, staying with Milton

would prove a burden, but it was not one Carl Brookman was anxious to shake. For what he had in mind, it would be necessary that he become his cousin's closest companion. Milton's mawkish performance had answered the question of how he was going to die. Good old Miltie was going to commit suicide.

During the weeks following his mother's death, Milton's cooperation was phenomenal. If Carl Brookman had been prone to rash movements he might have killed his cousin and hoped the police would consider it suicide. Certainly Miltie gave the impression he was suicidal.

Cousin Miltie had written five suicide notes, burning each of them. unfortunately, before Carl Brookman could gain possession. Outwardly, he begged for death. Only he knew his cousin would never kill himself. He had found a substitute for mama, and it had made him very happy.

"Should I do this, Carl or that?" "Do you like this, Carl, or that?" Much to his disgust, Carl Brookman had become the sturdy oak and Milton the tender vine clinging to the branches. There were times, many times, he considered canceling his plan for murder, running away, before Milton managed to devour his strength like a lamprey sucking a trout's belly. Three things made him hold firm.

First, he had decided that destroying the pale lump of flesh called Milton would give him immense

pleasure. The second consideration was money. A half million dollars was attractive. And finally, Carl Brookman believed murder by suicide could be the most perfect of crimes.

If Milton were murdered, Carl Brookman told himself, authorities would look for motive and alibi, both dangerous items. Establishing a foolproof alibi would be risky, and covering the motive would be impossible.

But what about suicide? No one looks for an alibi or motive in the case of suicide, unless there was some reason for doubt. A suicide note would help. That seemed to be out. Milton hadn't written one for weeks, and forgery would be amateurish and risky.

Witnesses? That was the key to challenge, to adventure. Somehow, Milton must commit suicide in full view of a disinterested witness or witnesses.

No visions of sugarplums danced through Brookman's head at night. He dreamed instead of his cousin swallowing poison to the horrified screams of Aunt Harriet's friends, or blowing his brains out before Mr. Stokes, jumping from a bridge or slipping his head into a gas oven, suitably witnessed, of course. By day he continued to suffer Milton's constant company, hating him and the sedentary life on which he thrived. It was characteristic of Milton to present, unwittingly, the foolproof

scheme for which Carl Brookman had been searching.

They were sitting together one day on the bank of the river bordering town, almost beneath the black struts of the giant suspension bridge that spanned the rushing water. Milton was gazing up at the cars moving slowly across the bridge.

"You know," he said, "without you, I don't know what would have become of me. When I knew mother was dying, I intended to kill myself. I used to come here and peer at that bridge for hours. I'm ashamed to admit it now." He turned to smile at his cousin. "Don't look so intense, I won't do anything stupid, probably wouldn't have done it in any case—but thanks anyway."

Milton stretched and yawned. "Seven people have died that way," he offered casually. "Did you know that?"

"No, I didn't," answered Carl Brookman, trying to sound disinterested. "Bridge doesn't look that high."

"It's high enough, but that isn't what does it. Look," he pointed to the middle of the river, "see that odd turbulence? Rocks. Not too far under the surface either. That's where they usually land. Kills them every time."

"Kills them every time," Carl Brookman echoed, his mind drifting back to an incident from his past. Hawaii. Yes, it was in the Islands.

He could recall the black cliffs ending in a purple sea. Harsh sun-

light, perforating dark storm clouds had silhouetted the figure of a young man atop the highest cliff. I'd almost forgotten that Texan, he thought. Perhaps I should have warned him, but the clod probably wouldn't have listened, too busy showing off for that redhead wench.

The redhead had been the young man's fiance. She was buxom and bold, obviously thrilled that Brookman showed an interest in her. She had watched Brookman climb the cliffs, held her breath as he stood poised on the edge, and screamed with excitement as he dove off in a perfect arc into the rolling ocean below.

The Texan had no choice. He had to try to duplicate Brookman's feat or lose his girl. If he had known about the months Brookman had spent with professional cliff divers; if he had known how Brookman had worked and studied to master technique and timing until he surpassed the skill of the professionals, perhaps he might have changed his mind. But he didn't know, because Brookman didn't tell him.

When they recovered the young man's body from the surf, the head was shattered as though by a hydraulic press. It was some time before Brookman could enjoy the redhead without thinking about that body. The rocks did it. His timing was off and he hit the rocks.

"Hey, Carl," Milton laughed, shaking his cousin's shoulder, "talk



about a brown study. I didn't mean to worry you. Guess I shouldn't have mentioned about the bridge, huh?"

"No," Carl Brookman replied truthfully, "you really shouldn't have told me about the bridge."

Milton was wounded and dejected because Carl's role as companion and father confessor diminished after the day at the river. That couldn't be helped. Carl was operating at maximum capacity, a man greedy for time. There was much he had to know before he could complete his scheme. Hour after hour, day after day he studied. A diligent scholar. The public library, city records, architects' plans—he consulted them all with a thoroughness that would have pleased the CIA.

Finally satisfied that he knew the bridge better than the engineer who

designed it and the workers who built it, he turned his attention to the water that churned beneath it.

Map the current — where are the rock formations, the sand bars, the mud? The river relinquished itself, secret by secret, to his meticulous research. When he had conquered the river on paper, he traveled unnoticed to a remote spot far upriver. There he donned scuba gear and slipped quietly into the green torment. With expert strokes he swam to a point below the bridge. He relaxed and let his body curve into a dead man's float.

The powerful current tore at him, twisting and pulling until it slammed him against the bank several hundred yards beyond the bridge. Again and again he repeated his movements, swimming and drifting, surveying the river floor as he moved along. When he was through, he knew the time had come for the final test.

Late that evening, Brookman strolled casually along the deserted, fog-draped bridge. He reached the middle and stopped to look cautiously around. Tonight it was important that no one saw him. Convinced of his solitude, he hopped onto the metal railing and stood erect with athletic grace. Wind whistled in his ears, carrying the faint sounds of traffic from the city beyond. The river whirled and chorused below him. To a man who did not know exactly where the rocks and shallows punctuated the hurry-

ing depths, it would have been an ugly, frightening sight. But he knew and was confident.

With a powerful surge, he dove from the bridge, his form the epitome of everything he knew about diving. From the extreme height of the bridge, he slid into the water silently, a knife edge cutting the river between rock formations. As he pulled himself from the water, exhausted and happy, he fought the shout of exhilaration that threatened to break from his lips. Cousin Milton was going to commit suicide the following night.

"I took a walk along the river's edge last night in the dark," Carl Brookman told his cousin. "It was extraordinarily beautiful. How about the two of us going there again tonight?"

If Milton was puzzled by this request for a midnight stroll, he chose to hide his feelings. He was pleased to have Carl's attention once more, and if his cousin wanted to walk, he was quite willing to accompany him.

Throughout the drive to the river, Milton laughed and talked incessantly. Carl had lapsed into a peculiarly subdued mood. His cousin was afraid it was the prelude to being left alone again, and he was anxious to interrupt Carl's reverie. Nothing seemed effective. Milton waited until they were walking together along the river's edge before he blurted out his concern.

"Carl, it was your idea to come here," he said. "Why be angry with

me all of a sudden?" In answer, Carl Brookman felled him, open-mouthed, with a well-placed karate blow.

Bending over his cousin's crumpled body, Brookman removed the top coat and sports jacket, making sure it contained wallet and keys. He lifted Milton's head slightly and pushed it under the surface of the water, counting slowly. After a moment, he pulled his cousin free of the river and propped him against a tree. A quick trip to the car parked off the road produced a tire iron. He took it firmly in both hands and with careful, measured strokes, began to beat the still form at his feet.

Carl Brookman paused to survey his work. He was panting as though he had tried to run the four-minute mile. Yes, he thought, Milton was dead, without a doubt. With an unexpected artistic flair, he had created an exact replica of the young Texan he had seen dragged from the Hawaiian surf. He pushed the body into the roaring river and watched it bobbing in the current like a playful porpoise. Satisfied that it was launched on the proper course he cleaned the blood from the grass and from his person. He removed his own coat and jacket and replaced them with those he had taken from Milton. He made his way back to the car, feeling like a man who has just had a boa constrictor uncoiled from his neck.

The bridge was deserted. Carl Brookman knew it might be. Autos

seldom passed this time of night. The bridge became the realm of dog owners who strolled across the metal expanse, trying to give their apartment-bound pets some exercise before retiring. He parked Milton's car halfway across. There was no hurry. Determining exact time of death was an indefinite science. He had only to wait for a pedestrian. Only one. Though the night was dark, he wouldn't rely on his resemblance to Milton if there was more than one witness to compare notes.

An echoing footstep drew his attention to the rear view mirror. He saw a man, accompanied by a huge dog, step out onto the bridge. This was it, the time to act.

Mind clear, nerves singing, Carl Brookman sprang from the car. He stripped off Milton's coat and jacket and dropped them to the pavement.

"Be calm," he warned himself. watching the man make his way slowly to the middle of the bridge. "Be calm and patient. Make sure the witness sees you. Use the time to review your plan. Make sure."

Milton had been despondent. Everyone at the funeral had heard him threaten suicide. Now this man, a total stranger, and his dog would see him climb the railing of the bridge and jump. He would find Milton's jacket and coat. The police would find Milton's battered body jammed against the bank, exactly where it should be if he had jumped. No one would ever suspect that it

was cousin Carl who dived into the night. With superb strength he would swim to the bank, gather the clothes he had hidden, and stroll confidently home.

Closer. The man was closer now. Brookman could see the dog marching militantly at the man's side. Confidence, caution and care. He climbed the rail and waited, poised, ready. Check your position. Be sure of your timing. Remember muscle control. The man on the bridge paused. His head turned slowly in Carl's direction. His mouth hung open.

"He's seen me," Brookman muttered, "now—do it now!"

With the slightest backward

glance, Carl Brookman left the railing. As he did, a shout of surprise and rage tore from his lips. His arms and legs flailed, diving form shattered by what he had seen. His one brief glimpse had revealed a leather halter strapped to the dog, held tightly in the man's hand, and a white-tipped cane that tap-tapped against the metal bridge. The only witness to Milton's suicide was blind.

Roiling water rushed up at Carl Brookman. He fought valiantly, savagely, to regain the perfect arc that would save his life. His strength and skill were no match for time. It was too late. His eyes closed on tears of frustration as he hit the rocks.

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I went down that street real careful. Somewhere down there men were looking for me. They didn't want much from me—only my life . . .

MY OLD PAL

by CLARENCE
ALVA POWELL

HE SAID, Old Pal, we're both nearly done for, but they think I've got something they want so they won't be in a hurry to kill me. Not just yet, anyhow. I can stick around for a while and see what happens.

They sure don't need anything from me, I replied. Except one thing, and that's my life.

I know, he said. The bastards. You'll have to make a run for it,

Freddy. You got three hours before daylight comes. That'll give you a little break. Now I know these fellows, and I know where they'll look for you. I'd say do this: Go awful careful down the alley, cross Abbott and take the alley another block and when you come to Broad Street, turn left and keep going till you come to the river. Well, he paused. Once you're there you're in the clear and getting out of town won't be no problem.

Willie, I choked. You're a real pal, the only friend I ever had. And in a parting gesture I caught his hand and shook it warmly.

We had been together for more than four years, had stuck it out through thick and thin, and many's the time we stayed holed up in some cheap hotel room, or hid in empty box-cars, not eating or drinking for two or three days while the law was searching everywhere for us. Once we hid under a helter-skelter stack of scrap lumber and listened all night to them beating about us, sometimes in two or three feet of us, half of our bodies sunk in muddy slime until, about noon the next day, they gave it up and we got away.

We took a freight out of Memphis the next day and didn't go back there for a long time. The pickings in New Orleans was easy, the takes wasn't so big but there was enough there for a job every night if you wanted to work that steady. I didn't, so I didn't go on any

splurges and lived kind of quiet, thought I done a lot of walking of nights not to be seen too often in any certain locality.

Willie, though, he was different, more ambitious. There was something else, too. He was edgy, high-strung and had to be on the move all the time. He couldn't relax and take it easy like I did. He met more people, took on more jobs and brought in more money. He threw money around, sometimes, like it had no value at all.

Willie was big, over six feet and nearly two hundred. He might have been an actor, or a college football star, that is, judging by his looks, and I'm small, five feet seven and never more than a hundred and forty. But I'm steady, quiet, easy-going, and whenever we faced a serious problem, while Willie fidgeted and fell apart I was the one that thought things out, got us out of trouble and picked out the next town to go to. I guess our personalities, or our characters, as you might say, was switched because people mostly expected me, on account of my size, to be the nervous one.

He was always asking me, How're you heeled, Old Pal? Need money. I'd say, No. Hell no. I've got what I need, and can get more any time I want it. He'd drop a couple of C's on the table, grinning, and then walk out. That's how it got started. And pretty soon he'd ask me to drop off an envelope some place, or

deliver a small package. I felt obligated, which I didn't like, but as a sort of favor would do it. That went along until the axe fell.

Willie disappeared. I heard rumors about a king-pin in the rackets, a gent called Oxley that I'd never heard of before. It looked like Oxley was after both me and Willie, and Willie, I guess, was in hiding, too. The dragnet that went out caught me among fifty or sixty others. Most of them, following some preliminary questioning, was released right away. I was held, though, along with about a dozen others for further investigation.

I sweated, I can tell you, and thought I was never going to get out of that jail. They painted such a picture it looked like I was good for at least ten years. I had no money, couldn't get a lawyer on my own, didn't know what had happened to Willie, and where he was gone, so I had to talk a little, had to mention Willie and what I knew about his doings, which I didn't know much about anyhow, and the deliveries I had made, to where, and the names as well as I could remember them.

They let me out, and since I had never held a job they told me to get out of town. I don't know if they shadowed me or not. I couldn't take a change, though, and was afraid to pull any kind of job. I had to beg, something I had never done before in all my life. But I had to eat. One night I noticed a fellow following



me. I kept to the bright lights, and most of the time where I knew cops wouldn't be far away. He caught up

with me, though, and I figured this was it, either back to jail or a bullet in my back.

Freddy, he said. I been trying to catch up with you for three days. You're sure a hard one to catch up with.

What do you want. I asked. He was a ratty sort and I'd never seen him before.

I got word for you, he said. Word from Willie.

How do I know you ain't the law, I asked.

I ain't the law, he answered. Here's the note from Willie. He passed me a folded envelope and turning away abruptly, disappeared down the side-street.

It was Willie's hand-scrawl, all right. I knew that, and there was five twenties in the envelope. Willie asked me to join him in Memphis. After all the trouble we'd had in Memphis, I thought that was funny, something wrong with it. But I guess people always go back to the old places.

I had two minds, though, about this. I could be walking into a trap, or maybe Willie was in deep trouble, needing my help. I decided to go but, being afraid to bust a twenty, begged one more meal and that night left New Orleans on a fast freight.

That's why and how I was back in Memphis and with Willie again.

He was in trouble, like he told me, still of some use to the gang but I was marked for a bullet or a knife as soon as they could find me. Willie had said, Take the alley, cross Abbott and go another block to Broad Street, then on to the river. He had told me to turn left on Broad. I turned right instead, circled back as fast as I could almost to where I had started from, and crawled into a small tool-shed where I crouched, waiting and watching.

It was a trap all right and I had been set up like a pigeon. And worse than that, I had been set up that way by my old pal Willie, and Willie was Oxley, him that they called the boss. It was easy to figure out. Willie had wanted me back here in Memphis on account of what I'd told the police in New Orleans, and he had a gun hid out somewhere on Broad Street waiting to cut me down.

There was a pale light seeping out from under the door of the shack where we had talked. Somebody was still in there.

I held the cocked Luger aimed at the door, and I knew that someone would come out that door pretty soon.

The door opened slowly, cautiously, the faint glow lining up the sights of the Luger, and I pulled the trigger as Willie stood silhouetted in the yellow square.

COUNTERPLOT

new JOHN POND story

Hidden, lethal, three spies plied their trade. How to find them? First of all . . .

by DANIEL FRENCH



THE FOUR-STAR GENERAL waited until his office door closed behind John Pond. He held out his hand. "I asked for the best man

your ultra-secret agency could recommend. I hope I have him. A situation has developed which can turn out to be sticky, and we must get outside help!"

"What's your problem, General?" Pond said.

"At one of our secret missile-launching test bases, we have discovered there are five spies at work. We caught two of them with their transmitters, but they cannot, or will not, divulge the identity of the other three."

"They don't know their identities, sir," Pond said. "That's the way the KGB works."

"Very well. How do we get rid of the other three?"

"I'm glad you didn't say capture them, because that might be impossible if the base is big, as I suspect it must be. However, we can destroy their usefulness in a few days."

"You tell me how, Mr. Pond," the general begged.

"Give publicity to the arrest of the pair you have in custody, but don't use the names they gave you. Don't describe them; just say they are locked up. You have the radio transmitters they were using? Good, I'd like them."

"But how will publicizing the arrest of this pair destroy the others, Mr. Pond?"

"Wait, and see."

The general wasn't used to being second-guessed by a mere civilian.

"I'll wait," he said, rather grimly. "But I hope you come up with the right answers."

He didn't have to wait long. Within two weeks, three men suddenly left the missile base. When their records were checked, they had to be spies. They shouldn't have gotten past security in the first place.

The general was all smiles, inviting John Pond to dinner at the officer's club the next week.

"How did you figure it out?" he said. "We didn't have a thing to go on, you know."

"Begging your pardon—we did, sir." Pond took a long sip of his scotch. It was good.

He said, "Remember, we had put two of KGB's operatives out of circulation, and they knew it. But—they were still getting regular broadcasts from five men! Two of those broadcasts had to be false. But which ones?"

John Pond grinned, a little crookedly. "They couldn't find out, of course. It must have bugged the hell out of them. They could only do one thing. Pull their three remaining operatives out of the job and give up."

The general blinked. He knew when he was licked.

"Have another drink," he said. "And don't fail to leave your phone number. When I get in trouble again, I at least know the right man to call."

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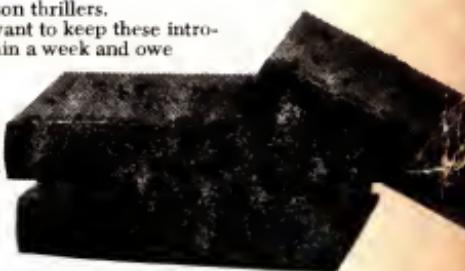
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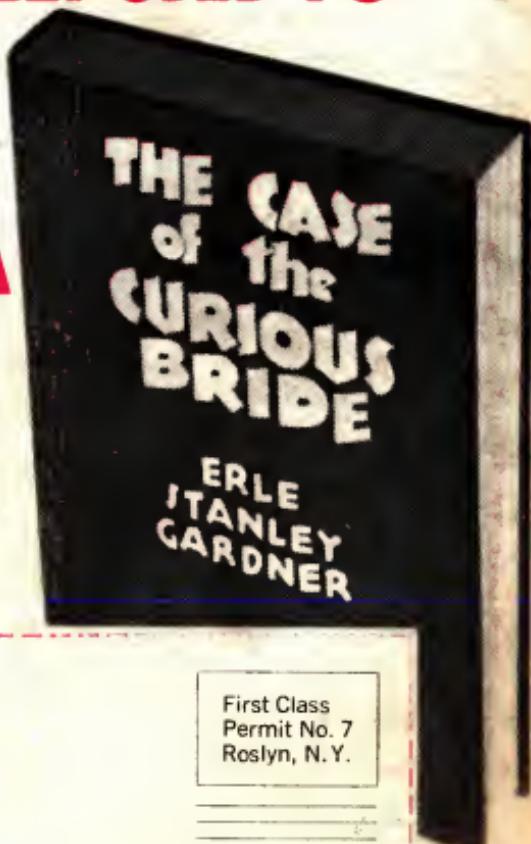
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